



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	04/08 Russia forces gone, Kyiv starts to revive
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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/08/world/europe/kyiv-ukraine-war.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=World%20News
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — On Feb. 25, the day after Russia invaded Ukraine, Kolya Rybytva gathered his grandmother and younger sister and left Kyiv “quickly and without unnecessary sentiments,” he said, heading west. His parents and brother stayed behind to help in the war effort.</p> <p>“The decision was made in minutes,” he said, “and it was one of the most difficult in life, but we all understood that war does not provide comfortable solutions.”</p> <p>At the time, Mr. Rybytva, 24, understood that he might never return. But two weeks ago, he did, re-entering Kyiv, the capital, just as Ukrainian forces were starting to push Russian troops out of the suburbs and, eventually, into a full retreat. After a month of artillery attacks that ravaged buildings and had Kyiv residents seeking shelter in the subway stations, a sense of relative calm is being restored.</p> <p>And people like Mr. Rybytva — who also works for the Free Belarus Center, a group dedicated to helping people flee the brutal Lukashenko government in Belarus — are returning to their homes.</p> <p>“The feelings are strange,” he wrote in a series of text messages. “It’s hard to explain. It’s not just a house. It is a symbol. And of course, I really wanted to hug my family and friends.”</p> <p>In Kyiv this week, instead of seeking shelter in the subway, people are now riding it; it is running on all lines, though not all of the stops are open. About 150 buses and 30 trams are working again. The City Council reported that more than 500 businesses had reopened within the last week. The Kyiv school district has started online instruction for students, including those in western Ukraine and locations elsewhere in Europe.</p> <p>There are still checkpoints and barricades on some streets, and sandbags are part of the city’s architecture. But there are also large lines of cars now forming on highways into the city, a reversal from the first days of the war when tens of thousands fled and traffic jams clogged the roads out.</p> <p>The deputy head of Ukraine’s presidential office, Andriy Smyrnov, told Ukrainian news media organizations that city officials were considering restarting hearings in the courts because a sufficient number of judges had returned to the capital.</p> <p>Though many residents evacuated Kyiv, others were defiant in staying behind, despite lingering dangers. City officials estimate that close to half of Kyiv’s prewar population of around three million remained in the city.</p> <p>Like Mr. Rybytva’s parents and brother, a large number of those who stayed behind joined an army of volunteer activists, a component so important to Ukraine’s defense that Oleksandr Danylyuk, a former secretary of the National Security and Defense Council, called it the country’s “fourth branch of the military.”</p> <p>Volunteers, including many who in ordinary life were far removed from military matters, provided body armor, bought rifle scopes online and gave them to soldiers. They organized a system of battlefield medical evacuation and set up field kitchens to feed forces at checkpoints.</p> <p>This flurry of volunteer activity highlighted a key difference between the Russian and Ukrainian armies: Russia’s military is top down, while Ukrainian society and even its armed forces are largely organized horizontally, Mr. Danylyuk said.</p> <p>“Let me get to the heart of it,” he said. “Volunteers are another force in this war. Without them we would have half of the capacity to fight. Volunteers are doing a phenomenal job, sometimes with risk to their lives. I’m proud of this.”</p>

Now, as businesses open up, they are blending support for the army with a return to for-profit activities. Yana Zhadan, a restaurateur and a founder of the Foodies gastronomic group, reopened a pizzeria called Bus Station last weekend. She said her company had been providing free pizza to soldiers and civilians.

“I see three main goals in our work,” Ms. Zhadan said in an interview. “To support the company’s employees, to support the city’s economy and livelihood with taxes and utility payments, and volunteering.”

The head chef had at any rate been cooking free meals over the past month, she said, but a shift to regular business activity was needed to sustain the operation. “Everyone wants to be able to do their job, because that’s how you can influence the most, help the most effectively,” she said.

“The city lives — there are children on the streets, flowers in the markets — and Kyivans want to be close to each other,” she said. “And it is food that helps to feel safe, at least for a while.”

When Mr. Rybytvva headed west with his grandmother and sister, he did some volunteer work, but soon he was yearning to return. “The feelings are strange,” he said. “You seem to be returning to your usual life, realizing that it will never be normal again.”

Just to be able to return, he said, was “real happiness.”

When you see the first familiar streets, you can’t even believe you’re here,” he said. “It is strange, joyful and painful.”

His apartment was not damaged, he said. In the corridor, which his family used as a shelter, there were blankets scattered on the floor as they had left them, and a board game, “which we tried to distract ourselves with.” There was uneaten soup in the kitchen.

Despite the disruption to his life, returning to Kyiv provided a kind of “triumphant feeling,” he said. “But you understand that it is deceptive — victory is far away, security is fragile, and in many parts of the country, everything is getting worse. You are not happy, and you cannot be happy, remembering what happened in the suburbs,” he said, referring to atrocities like those in Bucha.

“There is no joy, only anger and indifference, infinite gratitude to all those involved, that you have a place to return to. Pride that Kyiv resisted.”

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HEADLINE	04/08 Navy to decommission some newest ships?
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-us-navy-china-congress-6697d9c7cbc047de99e225d379256e44
GIST	<p>PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — The Navy that once wanted smaller, speedy warships to chase down pirates has made a speedy pivot to Russia and China — and many of those recently built ships could be retired.</p> <p>The U.S. Navy wants to decommission nine ships in the Freedom-class of littoral combat ships — warships that cost about \$4.5 billion altogether to build.</p> <p>The Navy contends in its budget proposal that the move would free up \$50 million per ship annually for other priorities. But it would also reduce the size of the fleet that’s already surpassed by China in sheer numbers, something that could cause members of Congress to balk.</p> <p>Adm. Mike Gilday, chief of naval operations, defended the proposal that emphasizes long-range weapons and modern warships, while shedding other ships ill equipped to face current threats.</p> <p>“We need a ready, capable, lethal force more than we need a bigger force that’s less ready, less lethal, and less capable,” he said Monday at the Navy League’s Sea-Air-Space symposium in Maryland.</p>

All told, the Navy wants to scrap 24 ships, including five cruisers and a pair of Los Angeles-class submarines, as part of its cost-cutting needed to maintain the existing fleet and build modern warships. Those cuts surpass the proposed nine ships to be built.

Most of them are older vessels. However, the littoral combat ships that are targeted are young. The oldest of them is 10 years old.

The Navy envisioned fast, highly maneuverable warships capable of operating in near-shore, littoral waters when it announced the program a few months after Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The ships topped 50 mph (80 kph) — fast enough to chase down pirates — and utilized steerable waterjets instead of conventional propellers.

The ships were supposed to be made versatile through plug-and-play mission modules for surface combat, mine-sweeping operations or anti-submarine warfare. But those mission modules were beset by problems, and the anti-submarine capability was canceled in the new budget.

And what about that speed? The fastest ship can't outrun missiles, and firing up those marine turbines for an extra burst of speed turned the ships into gas guzzlers, analysts said. Early versions also were criticized as too lightly armed and armored to survive combat.

The speedy Freedom-class ships proposed for decommissioning feature a traditional steel hull. That entire class of ships suffers from a propulsion defect that will be costly repair. The Navy proposes keeping a second variant, the aluminum Independence class.

Jim Inhofe, the ranking Republican on the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, said the program was plagued by troubles from the start, and that "moving forward the Navy must avoid similar acquisition disasters."

U.S. Rep. Elaine Luria, D-Virginia, was more blunt, tweeting that it "sucks" to be decommissioning so many ships, especially newer ones.

"The Navy owes a public apology to American taxpayers for wasting tens of billions of dollars on ships they now say serve no purpose," she said.

Some detractors proclaimed littoral combat ships to be the Navy's "Little Crappy Ship," but that's not fair, said defense analyst Loren Thompson.

"It's not a little crappy ship. It does what it was supposed to do. What it was supposed to do isn't enough for the kind of threats that we face today," said Thompson, from the Lexington Institute.

In the Navy's defense, threats shifted swiftly from the Cold War to the war on terror to the current Great Power Competition in which Russia and China are asserting themselves, he said.

In the end, the Navy may be content with smaller numbers of Freedom-class ships for maritime security and small surface combatant operations, said Bryan Clark, defense analyst at the Hudson Institute.

Congress must sign off on the Navy's proposal to decommission ships ahead of their projected service life.

The House Armed Services Committee on Tuesday grilled Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Army Gen. Mark Milley, chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on the proposal.

U.S. Rep. Rob Wittman, R-Virginia, suggested the ship cuts were "grossly irresponsible" when the U.S. Navy has dipped from 318 ships to 297, while the Chinese fleet has grown from 210 to 360 ships over the past two decades.

	Milley said it's important to focus on the Navy's capabilities rather than the size of its fleet.
	"I would bias towards capability rather than just sheer numbers," he said.
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HEADLINE	04/07 East Ukraine, Russia military razes towns
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/07/izyum-eastern-ukraine-razing-towns/
GIST	<p>DNIPRO, Ukraine — Early last month in the small eastern Ukrainian city of Izyum, Mayor Valeri Marchenko's phone rang. A man on the line spoke calmly in Russian.</p> <p>He had one question. When would the mayor meet to discuss the terms of surrendering the city to Russian forces? If he did, he recalled the man saying, the Russian military would spare the city and the 40,000 civilians inside. Marchenko assumed that the caller was a Russian security agent and that the offer was real.</p> <p>"I am the mayor of a Ukrainian town, and this town will remain Ukrainian," Marchenko told him.</p> <p>"If you aren't going to give up the city," the man replied, "we have the will and means to raze your city to the ground."</p> <p>In the coming days, Russian planes and heavy artillery fulfilled the threat, bombing the city into rubble and ashes.</p> <p>In interviews with The Washington Post in recent days, local officials, fighters and residents of Izyum recounted what they called the "scorched earth" tactics of Russian forces that destroyed their home. Ukrainian military officials said the wholesale destruction of towns and villages seems to be a deliberate strategy as Russia tries to take full control of Donetsk and Luhansk, which make up the eastern Ukrainian region known as the Donbas.</p> <p>Russian President Vladimir Putin has indicated that eastern Ukraine is now the primary target of Russia's war effort. Russian forces in the air and on the ground have withdrawn from the Kyiv region and are mowing down entire towns in the east, killing and terrorizing civilians simply for the fact of where they live, as they push to take full control of the region.</p> <p>Izyum was fiercely contested for weeks by Ukrainian forces blocking Russia's attempts to advance toward the strategically key city of Slovyansk, 30 miles to the southeast. Ukrainian military officials said the Russians seem to be pushing farther and farther south, toward Slovyansk to capture Kramatorsk, the capital of the Donetsk area.</p> <p>Izyum was seized by Russian forces Friday and is believed now to be the primary military staging and launching point for their assault on what remains of Ukrainian-held territory in the region, according to members of the Ukrainian military and local officials.</p> <p>To understand what happened in that battered city, which is now fully in Russian control and impossible to visit safely, The Post conducted telephone interviews and reviewed dozens of text messages from residents with relatives still trapped inside the city that describe the brutality of the Russian occupiers. Together, these detailed accounts describe a level of gratuitous violence and cruelty that add to the growing body of evidence of potential war crimes committed by Russian soldiers against civilians.</p> <p>Residents described hunger, mass looting and, in some cases, forced deportation at the hands of Russian forces. Several spoke of a highly organized system, led by Russian-backed separatists who know the area well, of arrests and forced disappearances targeting activists, community leaders, police officers and members of Ukraine's military.</p>

On March 3, the war arrived in the city center when a missile launched from a Russian jet struck Ukraine Street. Rocket and artillery fire throughout the day hit a small shopping district and residential area, according to local authorities. The attack killed eight, including two children, and severely damaged the main hospital. It was the start of an assault that local officials said killed hundreds and drove thousands from the city.

Vitali, 31, who asked to be identified only by his first name out of concern for family members living under Russian occupation, was just 300 yards away when a bomb dropped from a Russian aircraft struck the city. The blast violently shook his apartment building, knocking framed family photographs off the walls of his fifth-floor flat.

“I was terrified. ... Everything was trembling,” said Vitali, who fled with his wife and 10-year-old child to a crowded, unlit basement shelter filled with his panicked neighbors.

Artillery strikes and aerial bombardment by Russian forces damaged water pumping stations, the local power plant and gas lines. Shelling took out a television tower and damaged telephone communication networks, cutting much of the city off from the outside world.

“These are the tactics of those barbarians,” said Maksym Strelnik, a city council member. “First they destroy the civilian infrastructure — everything needed for a functioning town, creating conditions for a humanitarian catastrophe, inciting panic and despair among the population.”

Indiscriminate shelling destroyed residential buildings, factories and schools, and heavily damaged both of the city’s newly refurbished hospitals, both of which were forced to close. Images reviewed by The Post show massive craters in once-bustling roadways and buildings reduced to rubble. Local authorities estimated that 80 percent of the city had been destroyed, with only a few homes unscathed.

On John Lennon Square, a plaza renamed from “Soviet Square” as part of the country’s effort to break with communist symbols of the country’s Soviet past, Russian forces bombed a mural to the famous Beatle reading “Give Peace a Chance.” Dozens of apartments in a building nearby were left uninhabitable. A Ukrainian Orthodox church that survived the Nazi occupation in World War II also was damaged.

During the month-long siege and current occupation by the Russian military, local officials have received thousands of messages, from residents desperate for information and from those seeking to save people trapped in the city. The mayor and city council members are often the last hope for families seeking salvation for their loved ones. One message sent to a city council member on March 4 read simply: “Fire.” Another said: “We are trapped.”

“Every day, every hour, they started pounding harder and harder,” Vitali said. “We had no information and didn’t understand where this was all headed. We were ready to escape but didn’t know how to leave.”

With the help of people from nearby cities, local authorities interviewed said they organized the evacuation of thousands of civilians on buses that came under constant fire from Russian artillery and rockets.

On March 9, the city was hit with a heavy barrage of shelling from Russian forces trying to crush the resistance by Ukrainian fighters still in the city. Without gas or electricity, Vitali was cooking over a wood fire near the entryway to his building when the Ukrainian soldiers arrived at his apartment block under heavy shelling. They were driving a small bus to evacuate civilians. Vitali and his family had less than one minute to escape.

“I had just finished cooking when a minibus belonging to the territorial defense drove up the street and a soldier signaled for us to get in the vehicle,” he told The Post. “No advance warning, no preparation, whoever had their stuff packed took it, those that didn’t just jumped in with what they had, without money or documents.”

By March 14, Russian armored columns controlling nearly all exits from the city crossed the Siversky-Donetsk river that divides the town. They overran the remaining Ukrainian military defenses and endangered the last evacuation corridor organized by local authorities. The evacuations ground to a halt after a Russian tank destroyed one of the buses and injured civilians inside.

That same day, Marchenko, the mayor, said he received an order from the region's military administration that he, too, had to evacuate. "We understood if we don't go now there wouldn't be another chance to do so," he said.

Since March 15, there have been no deliveries of food, medical supplies or water to the city, and all efforts to organize an evacuation of civilians have failed, Marchenko said.

After a month without electricity, heat or running water, food and medicine stockpiles are now depleted, he said. There is growing evidence that residents are facing starvation.

A woman texted to Strelnik, the city council member, on March 29 that her disabled 85-year-old mother was trapped, alone and on the verge of starvation. "I know she was eating raw potatoes and now even that is gone — everything is gone," the woman wrote. "You are her last hope. Thank you."

But with the Russians in control of the city and advancing toward the rest of territory held by the Ukrainian government in the east, there was little he could do. "The occupiers aren't letting anyone in," he responded.

Some of those who escaped have even requested assistance negotiating with the Russians to win release of family members detained by the invaders.

"Maybe we can agree with them somehow," read one message received Friday by a council member. The woman's husband, active in an organization promoting Ukrainian culture, was detained by Russian forces March 29.

"He will be killed. They should have released him by now," the woman wrote, "Please help, I know that you can."

Information coming out of the city has slowed in recent days as Russian signal jammers block much of the remaining cellphone capacity. And without electricity, most people have no way to charge their phones. Russian soldiers worried that the local population could be feeding information to the Ukrainian military search for cellphones, often forcing men, women and children caught walking in the streets to strip naked in near-freezing temperatures, according to local officials.

The heavy fighting between Russian forces and Ukrainian military units has moved away from the outskirts of the city and toward neighboring villages as the advancing troops move to secure the surrounding areas. Multiple Ukrainian fighters interviewed by The Post spoke of intense shelling and targeting of rural settlements near Izyum in recent days.

"They are on the offensive and have been using scorched-earth tactics, basically erasing Izyum and the neighboring villages from the face of the earth with artillery and aviation," said Yuriy Kochevenko, whose unit has battled Russian forces.

Ukrainian troops continue to fight back, shooting down several Russian warplanes in recent days, deploying antitank weapons to destroy Russian armored vehicles gathering in the area. "They are clearly concentrating forces for a new, powerful strike," he said.

The Russians have now turned their sights on securing these newly occupied areas and stamping out any civilian resistance. According to messages sent by residents inside the city, Russian soldiers rounded up civilians to announce to them that their mayor, Marchenko, had been replaced, telling the assembled crowd, "You've been left behind."

HEADLINE	04/08 Russia dead troop bodies left behind
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/08/russia-war-dead-soldiers-bodies/
GIST	<p>Soon after the invasion began, a hashtag war slogan popped up everywhere in Russia: “We don’t leave ours behind.” But many were.</p> <p>In Irpin, on the outskirts of the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, two Russian soldiers killed in battle lay on a street corner, covered with a sheet of metal, legs poking out. A third lay a few feet away near a burned-out armored personnel carrier, a lower leg gnawed by dogs. A fourth lay further along the road, the victim of a mine.</p> <p>In Moshchun, a once-idyllic hamlet northwest of Kyiv, another Russian soldier died badly inside a dimly lit kitchen, lying on a bench with a gruesome groin wound. Ten others were scattered about, several on the fringes of a forest.</p> <p>While countless bodies have been abandoned on the battlefield, many more have found their way back to their families, but Russia’s overall death toll, though staggering, remains elusive. At home, the Kremlin has clamped down on news of military casualties, apparently wary of how a nation’s grief could turn volatile. In 2015, Putin signed a decree declaring all military deaths a state secret, and last year Russia criminalized statements discrediting the military.</p> <p>NATO estimates that Russia has lost 7,000 to 15,000 troops during the six-week war, a startling number, while Ukraine puts the toll at 18,600. Those figures rival, if not exceed, the 14,453 lost during the Soviet Union’s roughly 10-year war in Afghanistan and the 11,000 Russian service members who died in the two Chechen wars.</p> <p>Russia puts the official military death toll of the Ukrainian campaign at 1,351, and state television does not dwell on this figure. With Russia now apparently girding for a grueling war of attrition and analysts predicting that Moscow will keep plowing in massive numbers of troops and material, the media in the Russian towns and cities that have lost the largest number of their sons are strangely quiet.</p> <p>Dozens from the Russian town of Aleysk, in the Altai region, reportedly died in the first days of the war in fighting near the Ukrainian city of Chernihiv. After news reached families, there was only one cryptic reference on the local community online news page: “Dear military family members! We kindly ask you not to allow people to gather in one place, not to succumb to provocative information.”</p> <p>A similar notice on the eternal memory page for Chelyabinsk — another Russian city with significant casualties — warned against fake information “created with the aim of whipping up hysteria.” People must not share news of deaths, it added, claiming that “Nazis from Ukraine” were trying to “collect information about our soldiers for the subsequent development of fake information.”</p> <p>‘The first week was like darkness’</p> <p>Vadim Kolodiy, a 19-year-old gunner from the 136th Reconnaissance Battalion based in Naro-Fominsk outside Moscow, died after he was attacked and trapped in his armored personnel carrier, the Russian military told his mother, Tatyana, last month, but she never received his body.</p> <p>“I am hysterical. Vadim didn’t even have a chance to escape. He burned inside,” she wrote on social media. “The first week was like darkness. Pain, tears. I could not sleep or eat.” She said she felt anger at men in their 30s and 40s out drinking beer, while “children” in their late teens and early 20s were dead.</p> <p>A few weeks after Kolodiy’s reported death, charred remains thought to be his were analyzed in a laboratory in Rostov, but the DNA did not match.</p> <p>“No one is looking for these children,” Tatyana said. “No one cares about them. How many of these children, husbands, are there? How much pain had this all brought?”</p>

Nikita Deryabin's widow, Anya Deryabina, buried her husband last month, but still does not have a feeling of closure. Deryabin, 25, of Chelyabinsk had adored his wife and three young children. A sniper who loved the military, he was sent on a "training exercise," only to be killed in battle March 8.

"I still can't realize or believe that this is true," Deryabina said in written answers to questions because she said she could not speak without crying. At night, she dreams of him, feeling he is still with her. "Every day I talk to him. Every day I ask him what for and why."

"My brain refuses to accept the information that Nikitka is dead," she said, using a diminutive nickname. "I am still waiting for him to call, to come back."

Some bereaved family members want Russia to redouble its military campaign in Ukraine so, they say, that their boys will not have died in vain.

Gulnara Valiyeva, 43, whose son Yevgeny was killed with his German shepherd service dog in Hostomel, near Kyiv, called on social media for Russia to keep fighting "to the end." She buried him, and is begging the military to let her have the female Belgian shepherd pup he was training before he left, so that she can keep part of him.

But there are also flashes of dissent. "People are saying that their relatives are sent (to Ukraine.) What the f--- is this about? For what?" commented Olga Filippova on March 11, under Valiyeva's online post about her son's memorial.

Trying to return the bodies

Ukraine has about 7,000 unclaimed Russian corpses in morgues and refrigerated rail cars, according to Oleksiy Arestovych, adviser to the head of Ukraine's presidential administration. He said his government's figure of 18,600 Russian dead was based on Ukrainian reports from the battlefield and intercepted Russian military communications.

Ukraine tried to return the bodies of 3,000 Russian service members on the third day of the war, he said. "They said, 'We don't believe in such quantities. We don't have this number. We're not ready to accept them.' " Ukraine proposed an exchange several times, he said, but "they won't discuss this at all yet."

So Ukraine's Ministry of Internal Affairs set up a website and Telegram channel where Russians can search photos of the dead and prisoners of war, or fill out an online form seeking information about family members.

Russia's Ministry of Defense did not respond to requests for comment.

Yevheni Velichko, the 32-year-old mayor of Voznesensk, a southern Ukrainian town, asked residents to collect Russian corpses after a two-day battle "so that we can send these guys back to their mothers and wives."

"Russian or not Russian, we treated the bodies with dignity," he said, adding that they were sent to Kyiv. In nearby Bashtanka village, Mayor Oleksandr Beregovyi said dead Russians were buried in mass graves after their documents were collected.

Pivoting to brute force

Keir Giles of the London-based think tank Chatham House said the difference between Western and Russian military attitudes about their war dead was "night and day ... in exactly the same way as their attitude to civilian casualties and collateral damage is utterly unrecognizable from how Western militaries operate."

Russia had planned a swift operation in Ukraine, similar to what it had planned in its wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya, but then got bogged down. “And then Russia pivots from the clever way to the brute force way of winning wars,” Giles said, and casualties mount on both sides.

In Chechnya, Russian officials had expected swift triumph. The storming of the capital, Grozny, in 1994 was a catastrophe, with soldiers in armored vehicles getting lost and lacking air support and working radios. But Russia’s media at the time was free, and civil society was blossoming. News programs aired footage of Russian soldiers burning alive in armored vehicles. Horrified parents of soldiers simply went to Chechnya and took their sons home.

The Soldiers’ Mothers Committee, then led by Valentina Melnikova, was a focal point for protests and anger. In December last year, as Russia’s military massed near Ukraine, her phone was ringing off the hook again, although she is long retired, Melnikova recently told Russian YouTube interviewer Ekaterina Gordeyeva.

Melnikova declined interview requests from The Post, saying that it was dangerous for her or the organization to speak, because of the law against discrediting the military.

Before the Feb. 24 invasion, she gave parents the same advice as she did in the 1990s: Either go and collect their sons from the army and hide them somewhere safe, or tell them to run away, she said in the YouTube interview, the only one she has granted. Not one parent did so, she said.

After the invasion, “I felt like I was back in 1995. It was a terrible feeling,” she said. “It was like Grozny again, when around 2,500 dead soldiers lay on the streets for a month, half-eaten by animals.” She said she believes Ukraine’s list is fairly accurate because it lists names from identity documents.

“But since our army does not collect the bodies of the dead and don’t always pick up the wounded, there can be many discrepancies,” she said, referring to Russia’s figures. “It’s cheaper to report them as ‘missing in action.’”

Sergei Krivenko, director of the rights group “Citizen Army Law,” said Russians were sensitive about deaths of conscripts. Putin has said that conscripts have not been sent to Ukraine, but some have been. Losses among volunteers or “contract” soldiers in Ukraine, however, are less shocking.

“The mentality is that you’re paid for this and if you are sent to a military operation and you die, it’s your choice,” Krivenko said. “A soldier is just a tool to do a job. ... The main task is to destroy the enemy, and how many losses we take is a secondary issue.”

Krivenko said he doubted the mounting Russian deaths would spark enough popular discontent to threaten Putin.

“Propaganda is shouting constantly that we are defeating fascists in Ukraine. So as long as the number of dead doesn’t increase one-hundred-fold, I do not think there will be any instability,” he said.

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HEADLINE	04/07 Labor shortages impact summer travel
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/travel/2022/04/07/labor-shortage-summer-travel/
GIST	<p>Henry Harteveltdt had already lined up a couple of morning meetings at his hotel’s restaurant by the time he arrived in New York recently. But when he checked in, he learned it was closed for breakfast because of staffing issues.</p> <p>Getting room service was tricky, too. The travel industry analyst and co-founder of Atmosphere Research Group had to go through a third-party app, which had a wait time and kept crashing.</p>

“It became a lot easier to just go to the deli next door to get some coffee, and I made other arrangements for my breakfast meetings,” he said.

These are the kinds of service disruptions travelers can continue to expect during their spring and summer trips. Hotel housekeepers are [servicing rooms less often](#). Restaurants are [struggling to find staff](#). Airlines are dealing with shortages of their own, causing delays and cancellations.

As many pandemic travel restrictions ease, taking a trip may feel somewhat semi-normal, but a lingering labor shortage means there are not enough employees to meet pent-up demand. Now as the [busy summer season](#) looms, you may feel the shortage on your next vacation.

‘The bubble has burst’

Jamie Larounis, a travel industry analyst with [UpgradedPoints.com](#), said “we’re at a point right now where there is the most optimism there has ever been” regarding travel demand in the wake of the pandemic, in part because of dwindling covid rules and lower case numbers.

“Now we’re at the point where the bubble has burst, and maybe the airlines and hotels weren’t quite ready for it,” he said, not because they weren’t anticipating higher demand but because they were unable to hire enough people. Plus, travelers are facing [higher prices at almost every turn](#) — making vacations both expensive and challenging.

Many people in the United States have stayed on the job market’s sidelines in the wake of the pandemic, contributing to a [shortage of labor](#) in many industries, including travel and hospitality.

Leisure and hospitality [led an increase](#) in jobs in March, accounting for 112,000 of 431,000 jobs added overall, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. But employment in the sector is down by 8.7 percent since February 2020.

Among 1.6 million jobs yet to recover, 1.5 million are in leisure and hospitality, according to the U.S. Travel Association.

“A lack of available workers, coupled with the slow return of business and international travel spending, is restricting Leisure & Hospitality’s recovery, even as other sectors of the economy regain — and in some cases, exceed — pre-pandemic levels,” U.S. Travel Association spokeswoman Tori Emerson Barnes said in a [statement](#) last week.

She called on Congress and the Biden administration to remove covid-19 travel restrictions, such as testing requirements for inbound international travelers, among other steps.

Less customer service, longer wait times

One of the most notable shortages in travel is in a lack of customer-facing staff, Harteveltdt said. “Airlines let go far too many of their trained reservation staff and airport employees during covid, and even the folks who took unpaid leaves of absence may have simply said, ‘You know, I found another job that is less stressful, that pays more, or both.’”

There is also a pilot shortage, which Harteveltdt said is a function of having too few pilots with the minimum number of hours to serve on commercial flights. The issue is less pronounced than it was a year ago, when airlines were recalling furloughed pilots and getting them into the training required after they have not flown for a certain period of time.

Airlines have been hiring new pilots, but the process of becoming one is expensive and requires many hours of experience. Prospective employees with other interests “may pick another industry where the entry hurdles are lower and where the opportunities for advancement, frankly, are perceived to be better,” Harteveltdt said.

Labor shortages — in conjunction with other factors — have caused [flight cancellations](#) and other disruptions to air travel. Robert W. Mann Jr., an industry analyst and aviation consultant, said that when travelers run into [flight changes that require assistance from the airline](#), they can expect longer wait times and perhaps higher costs if they have to sort the issue out on their own. “When things don’t go well, it just is going to take longer to get things done with those fewer employees,” he said.

Hotels are similarly struggling to fill front desk, housekeeping, and other roles in “almost every part of the hotel,” Harteveltdt said. Hotels may limit the number of rooms available, and it may take guests longer to check in. Travelers may also encounter hotel restaurants that are closed or operating with reduced hours, and housekeeping may appear less frequently

Experts said many factors are impeding hiring, including higher-paying jobs outside the industry, reports of unruly passengers, less interest in labor-intensive jobs such as housekeeping and concerns around the coronavirus.

Summer help wanted

Travel destinations across the country are grappling with these issues as they gear up for the summer.

Robin Hoover, executive director of Yellowstone Country Montana, Inc. — Montana’s south-central tourism region — said the area bounced back from the pandemic fairly fast, with its 2021 visitor numbers “pretty comparable” to 2019. During the height of the pandemic, travelers flooded national parks and outdoor destinations such as Montana as cities remained largely restricted.

At least as many travelers are expected this summer, but when Hoover walks down Main Street in Bozeman, she said, a number of businesses have “help wanted” signs in their windows.

“I think any of your hospitality businesses are feeling that at least a little bit,” she said.

Carol Everhart, president and CEO of Rehoboth Beach-Dewey Beach Chamber of Commerce in Delaware, said at a local job fair last month that 28 participating businesses across various sectors, including hospitality, represented more than 1,000 open positions. Just 47 applicants came through. “That pretty much sums it up,” she said.

Bar Harbor, Maine, has been dealing with labor challenges for years, said Alf Anderson, executive director of the Bar Harbor Chamber of Commerce. Given its seasonality and the limited population, they have had to find other solutions, such as relying on J-1 and H-2B visa holders, and more recently offering staff housing and bonuses.

But the more acute labor shortage in the wake of the pandemic caught businesses off guard in 2021, when visitor numbers were even higher than in 2019. “To some degree last year, it was sort of unexpected as to how difficult it was going to be,” Anderson said.

This summer, he said, with strong visitor numbers expected, businesses are “going into this season with their eyes wide open,” adjusting their plans in an effort to maintain regular service.

Some businesses have gotten particularly creative when adding extra hands. Andy Newman, a spokesperson for the Florida Keys tourism council noted that Hawks Cay Resort on Duck Key [brought in robots](#) to do janitorial work and support serving staff at its restaurant. “The Keys are not unlike any other visitor destination. ... Labor has been challenging, but [we’ve] been managing to get through,” he said.

Larounis said he thinks “we’re in this kind of holding pattern until the demand starts to subside,” which typically happens at the beginning of the school year. “I think for everybody at this point, whether it’s hotels, airlines, car rental companies, so on and so forth, the push is just to get through the second and third quarter,” he said. Then they can reevaluate.

	<p>In the meantime, Harteveldt advised, people traveling for an event — like for a wedding, graduation or cruise — should leave with a little extra time to be safe. “Give yourself a bit of buffer ahead of the event if you’re able,” he said.</p> <p>He also urged travelers to exercise patience, particularly air travelers who need to speak with a representative, even as they may face longer wait times and talk to employees who aren’t as well-trained as they expect.</p> <p>“Be polite, be professional, and just remember that the agent you’re talking to, whether it’s someone over the phone or at an airport, didn’t cause the problem and is there to try to help you,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Ukraine Muslims face a difficult Ramadan
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/pkp4m7/ramadan-ukraine
GIST	<p>Ramadan this year will be very different for mother-of-four Niyara Mamutova. She moved away from her hometown in eastern Ukraine a week after the Russian invasion to seek safety in the western part of the country.</p> <p>But safety still feels far away for her, her husband, and their children, including a 2-month old baby.</p> <p>“When we hear the sirens, we have to hide somewhere safe. I have a newborn so we cannot run to the basement of our building. We sit in corridors where there are no windows. When we hear the sirens we feel anxious and when they stop we feel a little bit of calm. It means we are alive,” she told VICE World News via WhatsApp.</p> <p>Mamutova is currently staying in a town near the border to Romania. Residents have to abide by a strict 10PM curfew and the streets are filled with Ukrainian troops. It’s not the usual way to spend Ramadan, one of the holiest months in the Islamic calendar.</p> <p>“I do not feel safe in my new city because Russian rockets fall here,” she said. “Every day and night we hear sirens and it means that danger is close – the danger of bombs.”</p> <p>During Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn to sunset everyday for a month. The month of fasting is one of the five pillars of Islam that Muslims live their lives by. It’s a month of celebration, gratitude, and spirituality. Ramadan is often spent sharing evening meals with family and loved ones, going for nightly prayers at the mosque with the local community, and giving back to those less fortunate.</p> <p>“I miss that atmosphere of preparing iftars for a lot of people, gathering and staying together for Taraweeh prayers,” Mamutova said. “All these pictures stay in my mind and I remember that time when we were happy.”</p> <p>Before the invasion, Mamutova was involved in a Muslim women’s network spread across Ukraine. Ramadan would be a special time for her, putting together charity and social events. She says this year she misses the “atmosphere of sisterhood” that Ramadan would bring.</p> <p>Now, her days are spent concerned about what will happen next: “I worry about my four children. Their present and their future. They can’t go to school, do art activities or sports. We are living and waiting for the war to stop.”</p> <p>For Ukrainian Muslims who managed to leave the country, similar worries haunt them of loved ones left behind.</p> <p>Olha Fryndak left Irpin, her hometown of 15 years, on the first day of the invasion. It took her and her family a week to reach safety in Germany. They travelled through Moldova, Romania, Hungary, and Austria before reaching their final destination where they are renting an apartment from the local authority. Doing the journey with young children meant lots of questions and confusion along the way.</p>

“Every time we set off on the next part of the journey, the children would ask us ‘are we going back to Irpin?’” Fryndak said over WhatsApp.

“Usually in Ukraine, we gather with our big family every week to make iftar in our homes together, pray Taraweeh together, and visit Kyiv mosque to pray and have iftar with other Muslims. This year, it’s so upsetting that the mosque is closed because of the war in Ukraine and many Muslims are left displaced.”

She says she misses celebrating Ramadan at home now she’s in a town in Germany that she doesn’t know. There are no home comforts of breaking fast with family, or heading to the local mosque to spend the evening. Her children can’t take part in activities like Qur’an competitions in the way they used to. She gets emotional thinking about her community and family left behind in Ukraine.

It’s a feeling that’s shared by other Ukrainian Muslims who have left their country.

Olha Bawazir, a 23-year-old master’s student from Kharkiv, has also found refuge in Germany. Her home city was one of the first cities to face Russian forces when the invasion began in February.

“Ramadan will be different this year because the usual feeling of happiness and joy is not there. My heart pains because of my country,” she told VICE World news via WhatsApp.

“I wish to go back to my life in Ukraine. I want to have family gatherings like we used to, meet up with friends in the city centre, go to university, go to work, drink coffee in my favourite cafe, and many other things.”

It’s the first time she’s spent Ramadan outside of Ukraine. She keeps in touch with friends and family but mentions it can be “distressing” receiving messages from loved ones confirming if they’re still alive.

“This war has united all Ukrainians, from the east to the west. People I barely talked to before have now become like family,” Bawazir said. “My friends who stayed are optimistic about the outcome of this war because the truth always wins.

“After the darkest night a beautiful sunrise comes.”

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HEADLINE	04/07 Jan. 6 probe: Proud Boys, Oath Keepers
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/08/capitol-attack-january-6-proud-boys-oath-keepers
GIST	<p>The House select committee investigating January 6 appears to believe the Capitol attack included a coordinated assault perpetrated by the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys militia groups that sought to physically stop the certification of Joe Biden’s election victory.</p> <p>The panel’s working theory – which has not been previously reported though the justice department has indicted some militia group leaders – crystallized this week after obtaining evidence of the coordination in testimony and non-public video, according to two sources familiar with the matter.</p> <p>Counsel on the select committee’s “gold team” examining Donald Trump, the “red team” examining January 6 rally organizers, and the “purple team” examining the militia groups, are now expected to use the findings to inform the direction for the remainder of the investigation, the sources said.</p> <p>The panel has amassed deep evidence about the connections between the connections between the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys in recent weeks after it obtained hours of non-public footage of the leaders of the militia groups in Washington ahead of the Capitol attack, the sources said.</p>

And the select committee has also now heard testimony from award-winning documentary film-maker Nick Quested on Wednesday about contacts between the militia group leaders, far-right political operatives and the Save America rally organizers, the sources said.

The information, which could play a large role in establishing for the select committee whether Trump oversaw a criminal conspiracy as part of his efforts to overturn the 2020 election, is being viewed internally as a significant breakthrough, the sources added.

Most crucially for the panel, it could form part of the evidence to connect the militia groups that stormed the Capitol on 6 January to the organizers of the Save America rally that immediately preceded the attack – who in turn are slowly being linked to the Trump White House.

In essence, the sources said, the select committee now appears to have the same degree of evidence as secured by the FBI and the justice department referred to in recent prosecutions for seditious conspiracy and other charges related to the Capitol attack.

A spokesperson for the panel declined to comment on witness testimony.

The gold, red and purple teams have been focused on the video footage for several weeks, the sources said, with initial attention turned towards a now-infamous meeting between the militia group leaders in a parking garage near the Capitol on 5 January.

But the select committee was unable to discern from the video whether the militia group leaders even discussed the Capitol or their plans for January 6 at that rendezvous, the sources said, and suspect the meeting was a set up to provide them an alibi.

The panel has reviewed the tape repeatedly, the sources said, and House investigators have come away with an uneasy feeling that Henry “Enrique” Tarrío, the former leader of the Proud Boys, sought to have the meeting documented to later absolve himself of wrongdoing.

Tarrío last week pleaded not guilty in a separate DoJ prosecution that accuses him of organizing the Capitol attack. The indictment states Tarrío on 4 January told other Proud Boy members: “I didn’t hear this voice note until now, you want to storm the Capitol.”

The select committee has instead become more interested recently in communications both between the militia group leaders and the purported January 6 rally organizers, including Ali Alexander and far-right media personality Alex Jones, the sources said.

That topic was one of the central lines of inquiry that the gold, red and purple teams attempted to establish during a seven-hour recorded interview with Quested, the source said.

At that interview, the select committee also examined in excruciating minute-by-minute detail a 17-minute edited clip of footage shot by Quested that documented the Capitol attack, and video that tracked Alexander’s movements around the Capitol building, they said.

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HEADLINE	04/07 Calif. cities use Covid relief funds on police
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/07/covid-relief-funds-california-cities-police
GIST	<p>Big cities in California spent large portions of their federal Covid relief money on police departments, a review of public records has revealed, with several cities prioritizing police funding by a wide margin.</p> <p>As part of the American Rescue Plan Act (Arpa), the Biden administration’s signature stimulus package, the US government sent funds to cities to help them fight coronavirus and support local recovery efforts.</p>

The money, officials said, could be used to fund a range of services, including public health and housing initiatives, healthcare workers' salaries, infrastructure investments and aid for small businesses.

But most large California cities spent millions of Arpa dollars on law enforcement. Some also gave police money from the [Coronavirus](#) Aid, Relief and Economic Security (Cares) Act, adopted in 2020 under Donald Trump. The records show:

- **San Francisco** received \$312m in Arpa funds for fiscal year 2020 and allocated 49% (\$153m) to police, 13% (\$41m) to the sheriff's department, and the remainder to the fire department, according to the city controller. San Francisco also gave roughly 22% (\$38.5m) of its Cares funds to law enforcement.
- **Los Angeles** [spent](#) roughly 50% of its first round of Arpa [relief funds on the LAPD](#), according to a public [records](#) request by the controller candidate Kenneth Mejia, and first [reported](#) in local news site LA Taco.
- **Fresno** spent \$36.6m of its Cares funds on the police, making up 67% of Cares spending on city salaries, and roughly 40% of all of Fresno's Cares funds.
- **San Jose** allocated roughly \$27.8m of its Cares and Arpa funds to police salaries and the police dispatch department, representing about 12% of its relief money.
- **Long Beach** [allocated](#) the majority of its \$135.8 million Arpa funds to police, though a spokesperson said a detailed breakdown of funds was not available.
- **Oakland** allocated \$5m (13.5%) of its Cares funds to police salaries; **Sacramento** allocated \$2.2m (2.5%) of Cares funds to police; and **San Diego** spent roughly \$60.1m (64%) of its Cares funds on police in fiscal year 2020, and \$52.6m (33%) in fiscal year 2021.

The budgeting and reporting process varies by city and is often opaque, making it difficult to compare and analyze how governments prioritized police and executed their budgets.

In Fresno, the city allocated more than double of its Cares money to police than it did to Covid testing, contact tracing, small business grants, childcare vouchers and transitional housing combined. Oakland's police allocation was greater than the amounts spent on a [housing initiative](#), a small business grant [program](#) and a workforce [initiative](#). San Jose, meanwhile, spent significantly more on housing services and food programs than on law enforcement. And although Long Beach initially reported that it was allocating 100% of its Arpa funds to police, a spokesperson said \$11.8m of those funds were now going to direct relief grants and that a portion was also supporting the city's parks and marine departments.

Officials from Oakland and Anaheim both said that their Arpa awards were used as "revenue replacement" for their general fund, and said it was not possible to specify where the federal money went (though both cities typically spend large portions of their overall budgets on police, with Oakland going \$22m over budget last year). A Bakersfield representative said \$13.6m in Cares funds went to public safety, but did not specify how much of that went to police.

Cities have explained their spending on police in a number of ways. In a [report](#) for the US government, Long Beach said police were "heavily involved in the City's Covid-19 response", including opening an emergency operations center and providing security at testing and vaccination sites.

Stephen Walsh, Oakland's controller, said that claiming Cares funds for the police was an "accounting strategy" and that the relief money wasn't used to expand law enforcement, but rather to avoid cuts. He said this allowed the city to "pursue a great variety of worthy projects directed at Covid relief". A spokesperson for the LA controller also said the Arpa funds were used for LAPD revenue that had previously been budgeted, and a representative for the LA city administrative officer said allocations for "public safety services" were "consistent with the intent of the funds".

Hillary Ronen, a member of the board of supervisors in San Francisco, noted that there were minimum staffing needs for the fire department and police, and that Covid cases in those departments forced cities to spend large amounts on public safety overtime. But she also said she appreciated the criticisms of the law enforcement allocations and that she wanted to see San Francisco invest in alternatives to police: "Over time, I do hope to shrink the budget of the police department."

Cities using relief funds for police have typically funneled the money to salaries, although [The Appeal recently reported](#) that some jurisdictions were using stimulus dollars to buy new surveillance technology and build new prisons.

‘Cities hide their police spending’

The data in California matches national trends. After the George Floyd uprisings sparked a national debate about the role of law enforcement and calls for the US to “defund the police” and [reinvest those dollars in services](#), local governments across the US [used Covid relief](#) to maintain and expand law enforcement, including [Chicago](#), [Philadelphia](#) and the state of [Alabama](#). Meanwhile, the pressure to invest more in police is growing amid a rise in homicides and other crimes, even as the crime rate remains significantly lower than previous decades.

The significant stimulus spending on police reflects the longstanding budget priorities in the US, where police spending has [tripled over the last 40 years](#), with cities spending an [increasing portion](#) of their general funds on officers. Arpa allowed cities to replace lost revenue, so many of them funneled the relief to the agencies that previously received the most money.

But in California, a state with severe income inequality and a [dramatically worsening homelessness crisis](#), the stimulus spending has sparked backlash from community organizers who argue that the funds should have gone directly to civilians and that police should have accepted cuts.

“It was called the ‘American Rescue Plan’, but you’re telling me that what needed to be rescued was the police department?” said Stephen “Cue” Jn-Marie, a pastor and activist at Skid Row in LA. “The city’s kneejerk reaction is always to use law enforcement to respond to everything ... and the police forces keep getting larger.”

“When the money is going toward law enforcement again, it’s just increasingly criminalizing those that need the most help,” said Hope Williams, an activist in San Francisco, referencing the escalating police [crackdown](#) on unhoused people suffering from addiction in the city. Williams, who has sued the police department over its treatment of protesters, added, “It’s exhausting and infuriating, but not surprising.”

James Burch, policy director at the Anti Police-Terror Project, a coalition that organizes against police violence in Oakland, said it was frustrating how hard it was to get basic information on stimulus spending: “Cities like Oakland do everything they can to hide how much money they spend on policing, because if the public truly knew how much we spend on police and how little we spend on services, they would be infuriated.”

In LA, the Arpa spending plan was not publicized until Kenneth Mejia, an accountant and advocate running for controller, filed a public records request with the current controller. Some other cities’ public reports have not directly mentioned police at all, categorizing the expenditures under “government services” or “payroll”.

“It’s shocking and not at all transparent,” said Mejia, who has also [uncovered](#) how [cannabis business taxes](#) go to police. He further noted that LAPD was getting the funding at a time in 2021 when many of [the department’s employees](#) were declining to get vaccinated, with officers routinely caught on camera refusing to wear masks. “A city’s spending is representative of a city’s values ... and you think that Covid relief money is going to help people, but it’s not. It’s going to police.”

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HEADLINE	04/07 Omicron different symptoms from Delta
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/07/omicron-variant-does-cause-different-symptoms-from-delta-study-finds

People who have the Omicron Covid variant tend to have symptoms for a shorter period, a lower risk of being admitted to hospital and a different set of symptoms from those who have Delta, research has suggested.

As the highly transmissible Omicron variant shot to dominance towards the end of last year, it emerged that, while it is better at dodging the body's immune responses than Delta, it also [produces less severe disease](#).

Now [a large study](#) has not only backed up the findings, but confirmed reports Omicron is linked [to a shorter duration of illness](#) and a [different collection of symptoms](#).

The study comes [just days after the NHS added nine further symptoms for Covid](#) to its existing list of fever, a new and persistent cough, and a loss or change in taste or smell. The researchers found people who had Covid when Omicron was prevalent were about half as likely to report having at least one of the latter three symptoms as those who had Covid when Delta was rife.

"It is a lesson that we need to be far more flexible in thinking what the virus is and how it is going to present than we have been, certainly in the UK," said Prof Tim Spector, co-author of the research from King's College London, adding that the team showed data to the government around five months ago that showed a sore throat was replacing loss of smell as a symptom.

The study, which is to be presented at the European Congress of Clinical Microbiology & Infectious Diseases and has been published in the Lancet, is based on data from 63,002 participants of the Zoe Covid study.

The researchers matched almost 4,990 participants who had a confirmed Covid infection between 1 June and 27 November 2021 – when Delta was the most prevalent variant – with 4,990 individuals who reported an infection between 20 December 2021 and 17 January 2022 when Omicron dominated, with the matching based on age, sex and whether they had received two or three vaccine doses. The experience of both groups were then compared.

The team found participants' symptoms lasted on average 6.9 days during the period when Omicron dominated, compared with 8.9 days when Delta dominated, with infections during the Omicron period linked to a 25% lower likelihood of admission to hospital.

The results suggested only 17% of people who had Covid when Omicron dominated lost their sense of smell, compared with 53% when Delta dominated. However, a sore throat and going hoarse were both more common among the former.

Spector said the symptom-logging approach used in the research was an invaluable tool. "[It] should alert us what to look out for when there will inevitably be the next variant," he said, adding action needs to be quicker in the future.

"We need to be much more reactive in public health messaging," he said.

Dr David Strain, a senior clinical lecturer at the University of Exeter Medical School, who was not involved in the study, said the findings chime with what hospitals experienced at the start of the year when the BA.1 [Omicron variant](#) dominated. But the Omicron variant BA.2 has since taken over – and, in his experience, the picture has changed again.

"People in hospital are staying in hospital for longer and staff are testing positive for longer, so it is longer before they can return to work," he said.

The research came as the [React-1 study revealed](#) the average prevalence of Covid across [England](#) was at the highest level ever recorded. Meanwhile, the UK Health Security Agency reported on Thursday that 15.3% of people aged 75 and over have received their spring booster Covid jab so far.

HEADLINE	04/07 Crew shortage hits San Juan ferry services
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3427531/crew-shortage-cancels-inter-island-san-juan-ferry-service-sunday/
GIST	<p>Since Thursday afternoon's 4:15 sailing from Orcas, all inter-island San Juan ferry services will be stopped until Sunday morning.</p> <p>The state ferry system says the crew shortage is making it impossible to staff the boats.</p> <p>People who need to get between islands can catch one of the ferries that runs from Anacortes and stops at multiple San Juan docks.</p> <p><i>Interisland service on the San Juan Islands route will be suspended later this evening and remain out of service through the end of the day tomorrow due to a lack of crew. The Tillikum will tie up at 4:55 p.m. today, taking it out of service this evening and all day Friday, April 8. The boat's last sailing will be its 4:15 p.m. departure from Orcas to Friday Harbor.</i></p> <p><i>Customers still needing to travel between islands will need to use one of the other three remaining boats to get to their destination. Interisland service will resume on Sunday, April 10, which is the first day of the Spring schedule and the start of weekend interisland service.</i></p> <p><i>Thank you for your understanding while we work to maintain our fleet. We will continue to provide updates as soon as they become available, a WSDOT statement reads.</i></p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 Rocket attack on train station kills 30
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/rocket-attack-kills-more-than-30-at-railway-station-in-eastern-ukraine-11649409672
GIST	<p>A rocket attack on a train station in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kramatorsk killed more than 30 and injured more than 100 people trying to flee the eastern Donbas region, Ukraine's state railway company said Friday, as Moscow focuses its attention on a renewed offensive there.</p> <p>The station was being used by thousands of civilians trying to evacuate, authorities said.</p> <p>"They clearly saw that they were hitting civilians early in the morning, that at the station at this time there were thousands of people trying to evacuate, families, children, elderly," Oleksiy Arestovych, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, wrote on his Facebook page.</p> <p>Ukraine's state railway company said in a statement that two Russian rockets had struck the station with "the purpose of directing the blow to the passenger infrastructure and the residents of Kramatorsk."</p> <p>Russian state media cited the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic as blaming the strike on a Ukrainian missile.</p> <p>Ukrainian authorities are facing a double task of surveying the extent of damage left by Russian troops around Kyiv while assessing the growing threat of Kremlin forces in southern and eastern parts of the country.</p> <p>The Russian Defense Ministry said it had used high-precision missiles to destroy what it said was a training center for foreign fighters entering Ukraine, located near Krasnosilka, northeast of the Black Sea port city of Odessa. The ministry said that it also destroyed weapons and military equipment of the Ukrainian military reserves arriving in Donbas via train.</p> <p>Fighting in Donbas escalated overnight, Ukraine's general staff said, adding that Russian troops had launched airstrikes and artillery fire on civilian targets in Popasna, Severodonetsk and other cities near the</p>

front line between Ukrainian troops and forces made up of Russian troops and Russian-controlled separatists.

Mr. Zelensky, who has called for arms for Ukraine's troops and more sanctions on Russia, said the destruction in the town of Borodyanka was worse than elsewhere in the Kyiv region, where [Russian soldiers have been accused of killing](#), raping and looting during their monthlong occupation.

"We are dealing with invaders who have nothing human left," he said in a late evening address.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Union foreign-policy chief Josep Borrell are expected to meet with Mr. Zelensky on Friday.

Moscow has denied targeting civilians in its military assault on Ukraine and has called the video and photographic images of Russia's purported targeting of civilians in Bucha and elsewhere staged.

Ukraine has turned to Western partners in recent days for more support. Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba at a meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Brussels on Thursday asked for a reliable supply of weapons to deal with Russia's growing offensive in the east.

Meanwhile, Western countries have ratcheted up sanctions pressure. The U.S. House and Senate have passed legislation to strip Russia of its most-favored-nation trade status and ban Russian oil imports, and the United Nations General Assembly voted to suspend Russia from the U.N. Human Rights Council, reflecting international outrage over reports of atrocities committed against Ukrainian civilians.

Russia's troops around Ukraine have fully withdrawn to Russia or neighboring Belarus, a staunch ally of Moscow, the U.K. Ministry of Defense said. Russian forces, which have suffered setbacks and losses during their failed attempt to take the capital, would be redeployed in eastern Ukraine, where Moscow is hoping to shift.

"Many of these forces will require significant replenishment before being ready to redeploy further east," the ministry said, adding that redeployment would likely take about a week.

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HEADLINE	04/08 Sanctions: Russia tech spending declines
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-tech-spending-declines-as-sanctions-take-toll-11649410200
GIST	<p>Information-technology spending in Russia is expected to drop 39% this year as global business sanctions triggered by the invasion of Ukraine take their toll.</p> <p>On Thursday, the U.S. Senate voted 100-0 to strip Russia of favored trade status and back President Biden's Russian oil ban. The growing list of sanctions imposed by the U.S., the EU and other countries limits Russian access to a broad range of goods and services, including financial systems and certain kinds of technology. Tech giants including Microsoft Corp. , Amazon.com Inc.'s Amazon Web Services and Alphabet Inc.'s Google Cloud have said they are suspending new sales or the acceptance of new customers in Russia.</p> <p>The sanctions will depress IT spending in Russia this year by an estimated 39%, or \$12.1 billion, to \$19.1 billion from the \$31.2 billion forecast for 2021, according to researcher International Data Corp. IT leaders in Russia say they expect the sanctions will lead to widespread shortages of hardware and will introduce difficulties while they replace Western software with open source or locally developed alternatives.</p> <p>In 2017, Russia mandated that majority state-owned enterprises needed to start weaning themselves off software from Western nations, but as of February 2022, many of these organizations were still heavily reliant on Western sources, according to IDC.</p>

“Pretty much no one is expecting the sanctions to be lifted anytime [soon],” said Oleg Aksenov, a Moscow-based IT executive with 15 years of experience, including most recently as a division CTO at Russia’s largest bank, Sberbank, and one of the leading members of a nonprofit group of Russian digital leaders. “Most everyone is just taking this as, this is a new reality. We are going to adapt to it. It’s going to be like the days of the Soviet Union,” he said.

Hardware spending will decline the most primarily due to lack of supply, said Robert Farish, IDC vice president and regional managing director for the market comprising the former Soviet Union. Going forward, the weakened ruble also will make imported hardware more expensive, which will in turn affect demand, he said.

Karen Kazaryan, Moscow-based chief analyst of the Russian Association for Electronic Communications, said that there are Russian manufacturers of hardware, but their production is constrained by global supply-chain problems.

The war in Ukraine has disrupted the Russian hardware business, and foreign companies such as Intel Corp. and Advanced Micro Devices Inc. are no longer supplying parts to Russian hardware companies, according to IDC’s Mr. Farish. “They’ve largely not been producing very much since the beginning of March,” he said.

Ivan Kozlov, vice president of the St. Petersburg CIO Club, said large Russian companies have enough hardware stock for about eight months. Afterwards, he said, “We will see how it goes.”

Russian companies are turning to open source or locally developed alternatives to Western software subscriptions that won’t be renewed, according to Mr. Aksenov.

Russian alternatives include MyOffice, which has similarities to Microsoft 365, and 1C Co., which can duplicate some of the functions of SAP software, according to Mr. Farish, of IDC. Nonetheless, “the Russian software industry cannot cover all of the thousands of niches that exist in the global software industry,” he said.

Konstantin Grachev, the deputy CIO of a 611-store grocery chain in Russia, said his company had to scrap plans to switch to Microsoft 365. He said the company is currently using Microsoft Windows 10 and Microsoft Office 16 on licenses it bought several years ago.

“We need to reinvent ways to work,” said Mr. Grachev, whose company roughly translates in English to “Good Choice.”

IDC estimates that Microsoft’s Azure Cloud is the largest cloud provider in Russia with a 17% market share, followed by Amazon Web Services with 14%.

Mr. Grachev said his company is transferring its data from Google Cloud to Russian cloud providers such as Yandex NV and VK Cloud Solutions.

Sberbank, Mr. Aksenov said, uses its own SberCloud, one of the larger local providers.

While the Western software services are still active, Mr. Farish said, Russian users now understand the enormous risk in using them since they could be blocked by the companies or the Russian government at any point.

In the long term, Russia will have to develop more of its own technology products, he said.

“Definitely this is crisis time,” Mr. Kozlov said, “[but] when someone leaves the market, there is always someone else who will take that place.”

HEADLINE	04/08 Chinese tech giants revenue growth stalls
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinese-tech-giants-lose-shine-as-growth-stalls-11649410200?mod=hp_lead_pos3
GIST	<p>Revenue growth is slowing at some of China's biggest technology companies, reducing one of the industry's key selling points for global investors.</p> <p>After a sustained regulatory onslaught, the sector is confronting forceful antipandemic measures, which threaten to further damp consumer demand in the world's second-largest economy. The challenges are feeding into broader skepticism about Chinese stocks, since tech makes up a large chunk of the offshore market.</p> <p>Foreign interest in Chinese shares is weak, partly due to regulatory concerns and sluggish growth, said Dwyfor Evans, head of macro strategy for the Asia-Pacific region at State Street Global Markets.</p> <p>"It is too early to go back into Chinese stocks until we see some clarity around regulations and until we see an improvement in earnings outlook. Both of those, frankly, are going to take some time," Mr. Evans said.</p> <p>Earnings expectations have shrunk, since slower sales growth is likely to curb future profits. In another sign of caution, analysts have cut share-price targets. The average target for food-delivery giant Meituan's shares fell more than 20% in March, while those for Tencent Holdings Ltd. and JD.com Inc. dropped more than 10%, according to FactSet.</p> <p>China's attempts to bring Covid-19 back under control, including through lockdowns in Shanghai and other cities, have introduced new complications. Meituan's chief executive, Wang Xing, recently told investors that stricter pandemic measures materially hurt the company's main business in March.</p> <p>Internet-platform companies rely heavily on people's willingness to spend on discretionary items, not just on basic necessities, said Eva Lee, head of Greater China equities at UBS's chief investment office. That appetite could wane if consumer confidence stumbles.</p> <p>For the three months to December, Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. and Tencent each reported their slowest revenue growth since they went public, while Meituan and JD.com expanded at their slowest pace in more than a year. Revenue at Pinduoduo Inc. grew just 2.6%, as the company wound down most of its sales of directly sourced products.</p> <p>The regulatory hits showed up again and again. Tencent's online-advertising business was hurt by crackdowns on for-profit tutoring and the property sector, while its videogame revenue was hit by a suspension in new game approvals and limits on playing time for minors.</p> <p>At Meituan, food-delivery costs rose after authorities ordered improvements to riders' pay and benefits. More recently, the government has told the industry to cut some of the fees it charges merchants.</p> <p>The sales slowdown partly reflects the universal challenge of maintaining rapid rates of expansion as companies grow in size. And the latest quarterly results weren't all bad news: they also showed managers taking a more disciplined approach that could potentially benefit shareholders, and in some cases were signaling confidence by buying back stock.</p> <p>Tech giants have tried to manage costs, partly by laying off thousands of staff. Across the Chinese internet sector, companies are shifting focus "towards improving efficiency, reducing costs, improving cash flow generation, and cutting new investment spending," Sanford C. Bernstein analysts led by Robin Zhu wrote in a recent report.</p> <p>Meituan's fourth-quarter losses nearly halved compared with the previous quarter, in which it had paid a big fine. Mr. Wang, the CEO, said he expected operating losses from new businesses, including its group-buying operation, to narrow this year as competition became more rational. Pinduoduo swung to a net profit, thanks partly to more controlled spending, while the sale of a stake in JD.com lifted Tencent's</p>

	<p>profit. Alibaba's profit declined on a year-over-year basis for the third straight quarter amid heavy spending in areas including discounted goods and live-streaming.</p> <p>Some argue the pessimism has gone too far, after a 12-month period in which Alibaba and Meituan's Hong Kong-listed shares have roughly halved and Tencent's have slumped 39%.</p> <p>While regulatory action and uncertainty have hurt growth expectations, the selloff seems overdone, said Eli Lee, the head of investment strategy at Bank of Singapore. "I think a lot of this has been priced in, and probably much more," he said.</p> <p>UBS's Ms. Lee expressed some concerns about the outlook for discretionary spending, but said share buybacks were a very good sign for investors. Alibaba recently boosted its share-buyback program to a record \$25 billion, while smartphone maker Xiaomi Corp. plans to buy back up to \$1.3 billion of stock.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Shanghai residents plead for help
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/shanghai-residents-seek-help-online-as-daily-covid-count-nears-20-000-11649296811?mod=hp_listb_pos4
GIST	<p>Nearly a week into a citywide lockdown to combat a Covid-19 outbreak, many of Shanghai's 25 million residents turned to social media for help to get food, medicine or, if they are taken away for quarantine, advice on what to do with their pets.</p> <p>Cases continued to rise, and neighboring provinces were preparing to take some of the overflow of Shanghai residents needing to go into quarantine. Shanghai reported nearly 20,000 new local infections Wednesday compared with a little over 17,000 the previous day, according to the city's health commission. Over 98% of the new cases are asymptomatic, authorities said. Nationwide, the country reported almost 23,000 new cases.</p> <p>A top Chinese health official acknowledged that the Shanghai situation has "far exceeded what the capacity of the local medical system can handle." In a post on his social-media account Thursday, Wu Zunyou, chief medical expert of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said that in theory a megacity should be able to bring community spread under control in 10-14 days with repeated rounds of mass testing.</p> <p>Under the circumstances, though, "It is very difficult to control the epidemic in a timely manner," Dr. Wu wrote.</p> <p>Shanghai carried out another round of testing on Thursday.</p> <p>On a forum dedicated to the Shanghai lockdown on the Twitter-like platform Weibo, one user earlier this week begged for help as her sister in Shanghai was running out of food. She posted chat records to show that the sister, after waiting in vain for community officials to deliver a food package, was ready to break the stay-at-home order and risk arrest to find something to eat.</p> <p>A day later a volunteer took some food including instant noodles and cookies as well as stomach medicine to the sister's address, according to a follow-up post by the same user.</p> <p>Another user shared advice with others after he managed to secure dialysis treatment for his father despite the lockdown, saying before enlisting community officials, the first thing to do should be to ask for help on social media as a way of drawing attention to problems and put pressure on authorities.</p> <p>Much anxiety centers on pets, especially after videos emerged online showing a community worker in a white hazmat suit beating a pet Corgi. A local community official said that the owners had tested positive and that the dog was killed to prevent spread of the virus, local media reported. The official acknowledged that the worker who beat the dog had been inconsiderate.</p>

One Weibo user commented on the video of the Corgi's fate by saying: "We are better than that. I've seen [pictures of] Ukrainians fleeing a war zone with their pets. We should look after each other not only in good times but in hard times too."

Meanwhile, members of a grass-roots community who have been helping those with medical needs as well as pet owners are compiling an online Excel file with information on pets at risk, including their address and updated status reports.

A video showing toddlers and infants crying in a medical facility after being separated from their parents early in the lockdown created a backlash online over the weekend that was followed by authorities' attempts to reunite families.

A 39-year-old mother, whose post about being separated from her 2-year-old was reposted thousands of times, was reunited with her daughter early this week. "Thanks to all those who have supported me in the past few days," she wrote on her social-media account. "I will never forget your kindness."

Shanghai health officials said this week that a section of the city's National Exhibition and Convention Center has been turned into a parent-and-children hospital to accommodate young children who have tested positive but need an adult's company.

The municipal government has in recent weeks built several makeshift hospitals with more than 47,000 beds to house asymptomatic and mild cases, officials said.

The nearby provinces of Jiangsu and Zhejiang will provide a total of 60,000 hotel rooms as a contingency plan to ease Shanghai's straining quarantine resources, state media reported Wednesday.

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HEADLINE	04/07 Jobless claims lowest level since 1968
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-jobless-claims-fall-to-166-000-lowest-level-since-1968-11649335677?mod=hp_major_pos1#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>New applications for U.S. unemployment benefits fell last week to a near 54-year low as employers held on to workers in a tight labor market.</p> <p>Initial jobless claims, a proxy for layoffs, fell to 166,000 during the week that ended on April 2, compared with a revised 171,000 the prior week, the Labor Department said Thursday. The weekly total was the lowest since November 1968, when the labor force was less than half of its current size.</p> <p>The four-week average for claims, which smooths out volatility, fell to 170,000. The Labor Department changed its methodology for computing seasonal adjustments, which contributed to some of the revisions in the report. This change happens annually.</p> <p>Jobless claims have hovered around half-century lows since late 2021 as the labor market has continued to improve during the economic recovery.</p> <p>"Given how tight the labor market is, firms are likely being extremely cautious about laying anyone off permanently," said Stephen Stanley, chief economist at Amherst Pierpont.</p> <p>Continuing claims, a proxy for the total number of people receiving payments from state unemployment programs, moved slightly up to 1,523,000 for the week ended March 26 from the previous week's revised total. Continuing claims are reported with a one-week lag.</p> <p>There were around 1.8 job openings for every unemployed worker in February, according to the Labor Department's most recent data.</p>

The number of times workers quit their jobs in February was around 4.3 million, a figure that has remained elevated as employers raise wages and improve benefits to retain and entice workers.

A strong labor market has drawn in some workers who have been waiting for the right offer to come along, or for pandemic-related conditions to improve, economists say. [The unemployment rate for March](#) stood at 3.6%, the Labor Department said Friday, just above its prepandemic level of 3.5% in February 2020.

While the labor-force participation rate, a measure of those working or looking for work, remains below prepandemic levels, it is rising. It rose to 62.4% in March, up from 62.3% in February and from a pandemic low of 60.2% in April 2020. The increase in participation shows that high demand for workers and rising wages are drawing people back into the labor force.

Groups that left the workforce in greater numbers, like women and older workers, are also returning. More than 300,000 women entered the labor force in March, accounting for the bulk of labor-force growth. While there are still fewer women ages 16 and up in the labor force than before the pandemic hit, male labor-force levels have fully recovered.

In February, the share of retired workers re-entering the workforce climbed to around 3% of total retirees, its highest level since early March 2020, according to an Indeed analysis of federal labor data.

“The current recovery has crammed 11.5 years of gains into just two,” said Guy Berger, principal economist for LinkedIn, the professional social network.

Competition for workers has driven up wages, especially in industries facing the worst shortages, like leisure and hospitality. [Average hourly earnings grew](#) 5.6% in March from a year earlier. Though wage growth remains elevated compared with before the pandemic, [annual inflation of nearly 8%](#) is erasing pay gains for most workers, on average.

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HEADLINE	04/07 State Dept. debunks China disinformation
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/7/state-department-working-debunk-chinese-disinforma/
GIST	<p>China’s global propaganda and disinformation operations are actively promoting pro-Russian narratives about the invasion of Ukraine, supporting Moscow’s positions and blaming the United States for the conflict, according to the State Department center involved in trying to counter the operations.</p> <p>The department’s Global Engagement Center (GEC) is leading U.S. government efforts to expose foreign propaganda efforts, including Chinese state media reports and official statements claiming that the Pentagon is developing biological and chemical weapons in Ukraine, a spokesman tells The Washington Times.</p> <p>The center is “leading the State Department’s efforts to recognize and understand [Chinese] information manipulation related to Ukraine, and we are deeply engaged with colleagues across the department as well as international and interagency partners to raise awareness of PRC propaganda and disinformation,” the spokesman said.</p> <p>In addition to rebutting Chinese state media claims about U.S. bioweapons research in Ukraine, the counter-disinformation operations aimed to expose Chinese amplification of Russian propaganda prior to the outbreak of the conflict in late February.</p> <p>The laboratories located in Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia operate safely and securely and are not involved in any biological weapons research, according to Jerry L. Mothershead, a medical doctor directly involved in the program from 2010 to 2016. The laboratories are part of the Pentagon’s Defense Threat Reduction Agency that ran the Cooperative Biological Engagement Program to support research on local diseases.</p>

“The actual amount of pathogens at those central labs that can actually do any research wouldn’t even fill a broom closet, and there are rigorous biosafety and biosecurity controls over them, including destruction if need be,” Dr. Mothershead said.

Chinese state media, echoing Russian government allegations, has regularly reported the laboratories were engaged in biological weapons work. The disinformation also has been repeated by some U.S. conservative media outlets.

Kerry Gershaneck, a former Pentagon official and author of the book “Political Warfare,” said China’s professions of neutrality in the war are undercut by Beijing’s open sympathy for Russian President Vladimir Putin’s reasons for invading, support shown through media warfare, psychological operations and cyber attacks.

“Beijing’s external narratives are designed to undermine NATO, [Ukraine] and the U.S., and to support Moscow’s disinformation and propaganda designed to confuse global reaction to Putin’s aggression,” Mr. Gershaneck said. “Internally, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is exploiting Russia’s war to hyper-nationalize the Chinese people.”

U.S. officials say the laboratory program is typical of government programs that continue on autopilot, seemingly without end, under legislation passed after the collapse of the Soviet Union that requires continued funding from a percentage of annual defense spending bills.

Aside from the laboratory propaganda, Chinese disinformation efforts include support for Kremlin claims that Ukraine is a “core interest” for Moscow and that the military operation was a legitimate national security interest of Russia in the face of aggression from the U.S. and its NATO allies.

“PRC propaganda and disinformation efforts have evolved since then and Beijing has increased its use of Russian false narratives and is now also introducing disinformation of its own to advance the PRC’s agenda,” the GEC spokesman said.

A pair of disinformation themes

The State Department center has identified what it says are two main disinformation themes promoted in Chinese narratives. The first is the claim that the United States and the NATO alliance ignored Russian security concerns through the expansion of the alliance in eastern Europe near the Russian border. This narrative also advances the argument that the United States is exploiting the Ukraine conflict to suppress Russia.

The line of Chinese disinformation centers on what the spokesman said is the baseless assertion that the United States is working behind the scenes to prolong the war that has already claimed thousands of lives.

For example, a recent editorial in the Chinese Communist Party-controlled People’s Daily claimed that U.S. “lobbyists, military corporations and Capitol Hill” held a champagne toast to celebrate the crisis.

“Obviously, we condemn such incendiary, meritless claims,” the GEC spokesman said.

To counter the disinformation, the GEC is helping promote the narrative that the conflict and ensuing humanitarian crisis in Ukraine are the direct result of Mr. Putin’s unprovoked military aggression.

“The State Department will continue to raise awareness among partners and allies of the PRC’s propaganda efforts and call out Beijing’s attempts to shift blame while it continues to stand by Moscow and refuses to acknowledge Russian atrocities,” the spokesman said.

Through its information operations, the department will continue focusing its public diplomacy and related efforts to making sure world publics get accurate information on the Russian aggression.

China's government, mainly through its Foreign Ministry spokesmen, insists that Beijing is strictly neutral toward the conflict. However, the Russian point of view on the crisis has been constantly promoted in China's state media.

Chinese narratives are controlled by the Propaganda Ministry, which exercises strict control over all media in China, including newspapers, television and newer online social media.

The ministry recently produced a documentary film called "Historical Nihilism and the Soviet Collapse," that is being shown to the 95 million members of Chinese Communist Party, reportedly portraying Mr. Putin as a hero for seeking to restore the Soviet Union and restore the image of brutal Soviet dictator Josef Stalin.

While the Chinese government seeks to promote the view of Chinese neutrality and support for peace, Chinese information outlets internally create the impression that Russia is a victim of U.S. aggression.

The Chinese domestic propaganda is also promoting the recently strengthened close ties between Beijing and Moscow highlighted in the Feb. 4 cooperation agreement that says relations between the two states have "no limits." Chinese students are being indoctrinated in the "correct" view of the Ukraine war, while state media blame Washington for the conflict, according to the New York Times, which first disclosed the documentary.

"The most powerful weapon possessed by the West is, aside from nuclear weapons, the methods they use in ideological struggle," the documentary narrator states.

The documentary was labeled for internal party use, but video and a transcript of the film were circulating within China recently.

Under President Xi Jinping, who since coming to power in 2012 has pushed a return to hardline communist policies, Chinese propaganda has asserted the United States is secretly promoting "color revolutions" around the world aimed at regime change in authoritarian and communist regimes.

Retired Navy Capt. Stu Cvrk said China is trying to have it both ways — supporting Russia while offering to lead an effort to resolve the conflict. He noted the Chinese Foreign Ministry echoing of Russian claims about the U.S. labs in Ukraine.

"Official Chinese comments have been propagated throughout independent media sympathetic to the Russians," Capt. Cvrk said.

Chinese social media trolls on Twitter and other platforms also are engaged in promoting pro-Russian propaganda, often in collaboration with Russian online allies.

"They backed the Ukraine biowarfare lab fake story to the max," said Charles Smith, who closely monitors official Chinese social media activity disseminated by Wumao, or the "50 Cent Army" of Chinese government-linked propagandists.

Recently, Chinese government online agents have challenged reports of Russian military war crimes in executing Ukrainian civilians as fake news.

Another social media propaganda theme promoted by the Wumao is the idea that Ukraine's government is "nothing but Nazis," Mr. Smith said.

"The Russian trolls work closely with the PLA-run Wumao and often post together," Mr. Smith said, using the acronym for the Chinese military, the People's Liberation Army.

	<p>The State Department did not provide details on the GEC operations to counter Chinese disinformation. However, in the past the center has approached news media outlets and social media companies with intelligence identifying false narratives.</p> <p>In many cases, social media companies will shut down known foreign government disinformation social media accounts in response.</p> <p>The Global Engagement Center website lists several examples of Russian disinformation, but has no public material on Chinese propaganda and disinformation operations.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Credit-card debt up; inflation at 40yr-high
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/7/americans-ramp-credit-card-debt-inflation-spikes-4/
GIST	<p>More Americans are relying on their credit cards to keep bills paid as inflation has skyrocketed to a 40-year high.</p> <p>A new report by the Federal Reserve Thursday shows that consumer credit, the amount advanced to individuals for purchases, spiked by \$41.8 billion across the U.S. in February. The rise is significantly higher than the \$8.9 billion increase in January.</p> <p>The jump was fueled by a more than 20% rise in the use of revolving credit, notably credit cards. Non-revolving credit, including auto and student loans, rose more than 8% in February.</p> <p>Economists say the data points to Americans increasingly turning to credit cards to meet everyday expenses.</p> <p>“You’ve got a nearly 8% inflation rate, which is rising faster than people’s incomes,” said Stephen Moore, a former economic advisor to President Donald Trump. “People are actually losing purchasing power because inflation is like a tax on earnings.”</p> <p>“In the end, people have to spend more to get the things that they want and that’s a major factor in this increase in debt,” he said.</p> <p>Over the past year, inflation has soared by 7.9% — the fastest rate in more than 40 years. The effects are being seen across the board, but especially when it comes to the prices of everyday goods.</p> <p>Gasoline prices are up by 38% since February 2021. Food costs, meanwhile, rose by 7.9%.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 Day 44 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/08/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-44-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Kremlin has admitted suffering “significant losses” of troops since Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine, in a rare admission of how badly the war has gone. The Kremlin spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, said he hoped the besieged city of Mariupol would be “liberated from nationalistic battalions” sooner rather than later. • Ukraine’s president Volodymyr Zelenskiy has highlighted the bravery of his nation in his latest late-night national address. “Being brave is our brand,” he said, while calling for bolder sanctions on Russia. He also claimed Russian troops were preparing “elaborate propaganda scenarios” to make it look like civilians they had killed in Mariupol were killed by Ukrainian soldiers. • A Russian airstrike on a railway near Barvinkove station in Donetsk Oblast has blocked three evacuation trains from leaving, according to reports. Thousands of passengers who were meant to be evacuated on the trains have been placed at the station, according to the Ukrainian media outlet Hromadske.

- **Ukraine's prosecutor general, Iryna Venediktova, said 26 bodies had been found under two ruined buildings in Borodyanka, a town about 25km west of Bucha.** She did not say if the authorities had established the cause of death, [but accused Russian troops of carrying out airstrikes on the town](#), which is being searched by Ukrainian authorities after Russian troops occupying it withdrew.
- **Ukraine is bracing for a renewed Russian offensive on its eastern front, as Russian forces withdraw from the shattered outskirts of Kyiv to regroup and intensify their attacks across the Donbas region.** The Ukrainian presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych said [the besieged southern city of Mariupol was holding out](#) and that he believed the Russian efforts to surround Ukrainian troops in the east would be in vain.
- **The mayor of Mariupol, Vadym Boichenko, says more than 100,000 people still urgently need to be evacuated from the city.** Speaking on national television, he described the situation in the Russian-besieged Ukrainian port city as a humanitarian catastrophe.
- **Zelenskiy [called on the Greek parliament](#) to use its influence to rescue the remaining population in Mariupol,** which has had large ethnic Greek populations for centuries.
- **In his address, Zelenskiy said that the "Russian state and the Russian military are the greatest threat on the planet to freedom, to human security, to the concept of human rights."** In Mariupol, he said, "the same cruelty, the same heinous crimes" that occurred in [Bucha](#) and in the Kyiv region were being replicated, accusing Russian forces of re-staging the war to suit their country's propaganda.
- **The United Nations general assembly has voted to suspend Russia from the UN human rights council over reports of "gross and systematic violations and abuses of human rights" by invading Russian troops in Ukraine.** [Ninety-three countries voted in favour of the US-led motion](#), while 24 countries voted against and 58 countries abstained.
- **Russia will probably renew its attack on Kyiv if it succeeds in taking full control of the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk,** the deputy chief of staff of Ukraine's ground forces, Oleksandr Hruzevych, said. The Ukrainian deputy defence minister, Hanna Malyar, earlier today [warned that Russian forces were biding their time](#) as Moscow ramped up intelligence operations there and learned how best to fight Ukrainian troops.
- **The mayor of Dnipro, a city in central-eastern Ukraine, has urged women, children and elderly people to leave because fighting with Russia is expected to intensify in eastern regions.** [Filatov's warnings follow similar calls](#) by authorities in the Luhansk region, east of Dnipro. On Wednesday, the regional governor of Luhansk urged all residents to evacuate while they still could in relative safety.
- **Nato's secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, said allies had agreed to strengthen support for Ukraine,** and were providing "a wide range" of weapon systems, as well as cybersecurity assistance and equipment to protect against chemical and biological threats. [There was no sign Vladimir Putin intended to pull back](#), he added.
- **Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, called for more heavy weaponry from western allies and "ruinous" sanctions against Moscow,** warning: "Either you help us now – and I'm speaking about days, not weeks – [or your help will come too late](#), and many people will die."
- **G7 foreign ministers condemned "in the strongest terms" the atrocities committed by Russian troops in Bucha and a number of other Ukrainian towns.** In a joint statement, [ministers spoke of "haunting" photographs of mutilated bodies](#), alleged executions and reports of sexual assaults by Russian troops.
- **German intelligence agencies have intercepted radio messages from Russian soldiers discussing the killings of civilians in Ukraine, according to reports.** Two separate communications are said to have been intercepted in which Russian soldiers describe how they question soldiers as well as civilians, and then proceed to shoot them, [the Washington Post cited an intelligence official as saying](#).
- **General Mark Milley, chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, had grim warnings for the millions desperately hoping Putin sees sense and stop the attack on [Ukraine](#).** "It's going to be a long slog," Milley told the US Senate armed services committee in a hearing in Washington DC.
- **Soldiers fighting for [Ukraine](#) appear to shoot a Russian prisoner of war outside a village west of Kyiv in a video posted online.** The footage was originally shared on social media app Telegram. The New York Times said it had verified the video and the BBC said it had confirmed

	<p>the location north of the town of Dmytrivka and found satellite images showing bodies on the ground.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Nobel laureate editor-in-chief of the Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta was attacked with red paint while he was on a train, he said. The investigative newspaper had suspended publishing until the end of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, after Russia's communications regulator warned them to cease their reporting.
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HEADLINE	04/08 Russia laments tragedy troop deaths
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/08/russia-laments-tragedy-of-troop-deaths-as-zelenskiy-warns-of-atrocities-in-borodyanka
GIST	<p>Russia has given the most sombre assessment so far of its invasion of Ukraine, describing the “tragedy” of mounting troop losses and the economic blow from sanctions, as Ukrainians were evacuated from eastern cities before an anticipated major offensive.</p> <p>The comments came as Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy foreshadowed the emergence of more atrocities, saying the situation in the town of Borodyanka was “much more disastrous” than in Bucha.</p> <p>Moscow's six-week long incursion has seen more than 4 million people flee abroad, killed or injured thousands, turned cities into rubble and led to sweeping sanctions on Russian leaders and companies.</p> <p>In a symbolic move, the United Nations general assembly suspended Russia from the UN human rights council, expressing “grave concern at the ongoing human rights and humanitarian crisis”. Russia then quit the council.</p> <p>Moscow has previously acknowledged its attack has not progressed as quickly as it wanted, but on Thursday Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov lamented the rising death toll. “We have significant losses of troops,” he told Sky News. “It's a huge tragedy for us.”</p> <p>Russia is facing its most difficult economic situation for three decades due to unprecedented western sanctions, its prime minister Mikhail Mishustin said. The US Congress removed its “most favoured nation” trade status from Russia in a further blow.</p> <p>Kyiv has called for more heavy weaponry from its western allies and “ruinous” sanctions against Moscow, saying the scale of any impending Russian assault on eastern Ukraine would remind Nato members of the second world war.</p> <p>“Either you help us now – and I'm speaking about days, not weeks – or your help will come too late, and many people will die,” Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, told a meeting of his counterparts in the alliance in Brussels on Thursday.</p> <p>Kuleba said he expected Nato members to send Kyiv the weapons it needed, including air defence systems, artillery, armoured vehicles and jets, but insisted they must act fast while Moscow refocuses its offensive on the Donbas region.</p> <p>“I think the deal that Ukraine is offering is fair. You give us weapons; we sacrifice our lives, and the war is contained in Ukraine. This is it.”</p> <p>Nato's secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, said the alliance had agreed to strengthen support for Ukraine, was providing “a wide range” of weapon systems, and would also provide cybersecurity assistance and equipment to protect against chemical and biological threats.</p> <p>With peace talks between Russia and Ukraine continuing by video, Turkey, which has hosted two meetings between the sides, said images of what appeared to be deliberate civilian killings in Bucha and</p>

towns in the Kyiv area had “overshadowed” negotiations and ruined an “emerging positive atmosphere”.

Pictures and video of dead civilians, some with their hands bound, in the streets of Bucha after it was recaptured from Russian invaders have sparked international revulsion and renewed calls from Ukraine for more weapons and tougher sanctions.

On Thursday, Zelenskiy said the situation in the town of Borodyanka was “much worse” than Bucha. “The work to clear the rubble in Borodyanka has begun ... it’s significantly more dreadful there. Even more victims from the Russian occupiers,” he said in a video posted on the Telegram messaging service. The town is about 15 miles (24km) from Bucha.

Video from Borodyanka showed search and rescue teams using heavy equipment to dig through the rubble of a building that collapsed. Hundreds of people were feared buried.

Zelenskiy also warned that Russia was preparing “propaganda scenarios”, in which Russian troops would make it look like Ukrainian soldiers were responsible for the deaths of civilians in Mariupol.

Pro-Russian authorities in Mariupol said on Thursday that 5,000 people had been killed in the besieged southern city. “Around 60-70% of the housing stock has been destroyed or partially destroyed,” said Konstantin Ivashchenko, who separatists in the breakaway Donetsk region have claimed is now the mayor of Mariupol.

Ukrainian authorities had put forward a “conservative” estimate of 5,000 dead in the city, which they say is 90% destroyed, while indicating that there could be “tens of thousands of civilian casualties”.

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HEADLINE	04/07 Toxic: Russia media genocidal language
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/07/russian-media-coverage-ukraine-genocidal-streak
GIST	<p>Two days after Russia began its war in Ukraine, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency accidentally published an article celebrating the country’s lightning-quick victory over Kyiv, crowing that the “period of the split of the Russian people is coming to an end”.</p> <p>After a bloody month of war, after the discovery of evidence of war crimes in cities like Bucha and Borodyanka, the language in that same publication has grown even more extreme, containing calls for societal purges and “re-education” that western officials said could provoke further abuses on the ground.</p> <p>“Ukrainianism is an artificial anti-Russian construct that has no civilisational substance of its own, a subordinate element of an extraneous and alien civilisation,” wrote a RIA Novosti columnist earlier this week. The “re-education” of Ukraine could take a generation, he wrote, adding that “besides the highest ranks, a significant number of common people are also guilty of being passive Nazis and Nazi accomplices”.</p> <p>Even the name Ukraine must be erased, the article argued.</p> <p>Views that were once kept to fringe publications in Russia have gone into mainstream outlets and been voiced on primetime TV as the stakes of Russia’s war in Ukraine have risen. Western observers from Ukraine to the United States have grown worried that the language may be encouraging the abuse of civilians by soldiers on the ground.</p> <p>“This is another piece of evidence for a future tribunal against Russian war criminals,” said Volodymyr Zelenskiy, the Ukrainian president, citing the RIA Novosti article, which caused a major uproar among western officials. One of his aides accused the news agency of calling for the mass murder of Ukrainian civilians.</p>

Civilians in Ukraine have reported Russian soldiers citing [conspiracy theories about bioweapon labs](#) or telling them they were only here to [“cleanse them from the dirt”](#).

“Those sorts of comments are really creating an even more toxic information environment,” a western official said, and could “absolutely contribute” to abuse of civilians in Ukraine. “Responsibility for this, of course lies with the perpetrators of the acts, but it also lies with the Russian leadership,” the official added. Increasingly, Russia’s pundit class has pushed claims that a significant swath of Ukrainian society is under the sway of far-right ideologies, blaming Ukraine’s staunch resistance to the attack on mass psychosis rather than on legitimate anger at the Russian invasion.

“To my horror, to my regret, a considerable portion of the Ukrainian people have turned out to be engulfed in the madness of nazism,” said Margarita Simonyan, the head of the RT news network, during a nationally broadcast talkshow on the NTV channel. “That it is on such a massive scale!”

Analysts have pointed to the failure of Russia’s war in its early stages, as well as images of protests in cities against Russian occupying forces, for the escalation in Russian rhetoric.

Initially Russians believed that “‘de-nazification’ could be completed through regime change and Ukrainians should be liberated,” wrote Greg Yudin, a Russian sociologist, earlier this week. “Obviously, this conception failed when Ukrainians started resisting bravely. A natural conclusion from that: Ukrainians turned out to be deeply infected by nazism.”

As Vladimir Putin has called on his officials to push back against the west’s “information war”, claiming reports of atrocities in Bucha were staged, the government line has also grown closer to some of the most extreme opinions in the Russian news.

Dmitry Medvedev, the former Russian prime minister, earlier this week declared that Ukraine would face the same fate as Nazi Germany, an opinion that closely resembled the one written in the column published by RIA Novosti just days earlier.

“It should not be surprising that Ukraine, which has been transformed mentally into the Third Reich ... will suffer the same fate,” Medvedev wrote in a message shared on Telegram. “That’s what her fate is, that Ukraine!”

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HEADLINE	04/07 Radio intercepts: Russia troops kill civilians
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/07/russian-soldiers-discussed-killing-civilians-in-radio-intercepts
GIST	<p>Radio transmissions in which Russian soldiers appear to talk among themselves about carrying out premeditated civilian killings in Ukraine have been intercepted by Germany’s foreign intelligence service, a source close to the findings has said.</p> <p>The evidence was presented by officials from the foreign intelligence service, the BND, to parliamentarians on Wednesday.</p> <p>Reports of the radio communications were first published in the German news magazine Der Spiegel, which said the communications related to atrocities carried out in Bucha, north of Kyiv.</p> <p>Several of them can be directly matched to locations and objects shown in photos that document the aftermath of the killings, the magazine reported.</p> <p>A mass grave was discovered in Bucha at the weekend along with dozens of corpses of civilians lying on the ground, after the withdrawal of the Russian military. The hands of some of the dead were tied, while other corpses showed signs of torture. Numerous women and children are believed to have been among the victims.</p>

The Russian government has vehemently denied the claims that its soldiers carried out the killings, which world leaders including Joe Biden and Germany's Olaf Scholz have described as war crimes. Russia has repeatedly claimed the killings have been staged. Still, increasing numbers of witness accounts have added to the veracity of the reports. The United Nations General Assembly on Thursday [suspended Russia from the UN Human Rights Council](#) over reports of "gross and systematic violations and abuses of human rights" by invading Russian troops in Ukraine.

In the radio communications, Russian soldiers were claimed to have discussed how they had questioned Ukrainian soldiers as well as civilians before shooting them.

According to Der Spiegel, which indirectly referenced people who had been present at the meeting at which the BND officers delivered the fresh evidence to a select group of MPs, the recordings "entirely invalidate Russia's denials".

In one of the radio conversations, a Russian voice is heard telling someone how he and another soldier shot a person who had been on a bicycle. One of the many pictures of the atrocities to have gone around the world in recent days was of the corpse of a person next to a bicycle.

In another communication, a man was heard saying: "Firstly you question the soldier, then you shoot them." The impression given was that the soldiers were talking matter-of-factly about the killings as if they were discussing everyday activities, the MPs were told, according to Der Spiegel.

The intelligence material is also said to give credence to reports that the Russian mercenary Wagner Group was central participants in the killings. The group was previously active in the war in Syria where the vicious nature of its activities was notorious.

Speaking on Thursday, the mayor of Bucha, Anatoliy Fedoruk, said the number of bodies found in the city was increasing every day, with 320 civilians identified so far. Specialist crime scene officers had retrieved corpses from private estates, parks and squares, he said, as well as from temporary graves. "Almost 90% were killed by bullets, not shrapnel," he added.

The BND's recordings have intensified suspicions that these killings were neither random nor carried out by soldiers who might have been acting autonomously as has previously been suggested.

Other radio recordings are being analysed, according to Der Spiegel. However, the precise localisation of them appears to be more difficult. They reportedly point to similar activities in other parts of Ukraine, in and around the port city of Mariupol which has been largely destroyed by Russian bombardment.

The source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the expertise of forensic specialists in Europe was being sought as a matter of urgency, with independent experts needing to be ready to gather as much evidence as quickly as possible as soon as suspected atrocities came to light, of which the source said it was expected there would be many more.

A massacre in Mali last week in which 300 people died and in which Russian fighters are alleged to have been involved had "all the hallmarks of the modus operandi of the Russian army", the source said, adding it was similar to attacks the army had been involved in in Syria. This had raised the expectation that expert capacities to gather forensic evidence would increasingly be needed, the source added.

In Ukraine on Thursday, as humanitarian relief teams and volunteers ventured further into territory around Kyiv retaken from Russian troops, evidence of more atrocities committed against Ukrainian civilians by the occupying force continued to emerge.

As roads were cleared of mines and the wreckage of burned tanks and civilian cars, residents returned home to find their homes looted or destroyed, neighbours missing, bodies decomposing in basements, and

	<p>hastily dug graves in gardens. The violence and death in towns and villages surrounding Kyiv stands out even by the abysmal standards of other conflict zones.</p> <p>Also on Thursday, Amnesty International published a report detailing apparent war crimes in the Kyiv region, based on interviews with 20 people who witnessed or had direct knowledge of horrifying violence.</p> <p>A woman in a village east of the capital told Amnesty's investigators that on 9 March two Russian soldiers entered her house, killed her husband and repeatedly raped her at gunpoint while her young son hid nearby. She later managed to escape to Ukrainian-controlled territory.</p> <p>In the village of Vorzel, Nataliya and Valeryi Tkachova left their basement on 3 March to check whether Russian tanks were coming, telling their 18-year-old daughter Kateryna to stay hidden. After hearing gunshots, Kateryna left the cellar to find her parents lying dead in the street, her father shot six times in the back, and her mother once in the chest. She was assisted in leaving Vorzel on 10 March.</p> <p>"Testimonies show that unarmed civilians in Ukraine are being killed in their homes and streets in acts of unspeakable cruelty and shocking brutality," Agnès Callamard, Amnesty's secretary general, said in a statement. "The intentional killing of civilians is a human rights violation and a war crime. These deaths must be thoroughly investigated, and those responsible must be prosecuted, including up the chain of command."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 Interest in learning Ukraine language spikes
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/apr/08/ukrainian-language-interest-spikes-support-country-war
GIST	<p>Before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Scott Richards was planning to move to Kyiv from his current base in Zurich. As the eastern Europe team leader for an investment firm, Richards already spoke Russian. Now, with his family's relocation on hold, Richards is "diving deep" into studying Ukrainian and taking an intensive online course from Lviv's Ukrainian Catholic University.</p> <p>"I want to speak with Ukrainians in Ukrainian to celebrate their culture, their liberty and the incredible courage with which they are now standing up in their own defense in the face of indescribable and unprovoked brutality," he said.</p> <p>Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine, rooted in the idea that a uniquely Ukrainian identity does not exist, has only increased global interest in the Ukrainian language. Suppressed and denounced as a peasant dialect by the Russian and Soviet empires, Ukrainian is a distinct language from Russian, with a degree of similarity somewhat akin to that between Italian and Portuguese.</p> <p>The language learning app Duolingo reported a 577% increase in the number of global users studying Ukrainian and a 2,677% increase in Poland, which has welcomed more than 2 million Ukrainian refugees.</p> <p>In Ukraine, where native Russian speakers have increasingly embraced Ukrainian since the 2014 revolution, a new Ukrainian conversation club received close to 1,000 sign-ups in just three days.</p> <p>Like most Ukrainians, Sophia Reshetniak, 20, is fluent in both Ukrainian and Russian. She grew up using Russian with her family, but learned Ukrainian at school. (About 46% of the population speak Ukrainian at home, 28% speak Russian and a quarter speak both equally, according to a 2019 survey.)</p> <p>"It's my second mother language," she said. "I have friends from the west [of Ukraine] and they are talking in Ukrainian and we understand each other."</p> <p>Before Russia invaded her home city of Kharkiv, Reshetniak was a university student and taught private lessons in English, Ukrainian and Russian. She lost her regular students after she fled the country, but has since found new ones through a social enterprise called NaTakallam, which hires displaced people to teach their languages and share their cultures online.</p>

NaTakallam, which means “we speak” in Arabic, [launched in 2015](#) with a goal of generating income for Syrians in Lebanon who lost their livelihoods fleeing war. “You can give aid, but giving a job or giving income that’s earned is just so much more respectful and rewarding and makes people feel much more empowered,” said co-founder Aline Sara. “They get a restored sense of dignity and purpose, and they share their story, which is one thing we really need the world to hear” to combat discrimination against refugees, particularly those from the Middle East and Africa. The company pays tutors a minimum of \$10 an hour.

The platform has since expanded to offer lessons in Armenian, English, French, Kurdish, Persian and Spanish and hired its first Ukrainian and Russian teachers in March. Sara said about 150 to 200 people have expressed interest in studying these two languages, with “slightly more traction” in Russian as it is more widely spoken, though many want to learn both.

Reshetniak now teaches from the hostel room she shares with her 15-year-old sister in a Czech village. She was matched with her first students within days of being onboarded by NaTakallam. Two are learning Ukrainian and three are learning Russian.

While Reshetniak doesn’t see Russian as the “language of enemies”, some who once used it to get by in Ukraine are choosing to learn Ukrainian as a sign of respect.

Polina Levina, a Canadian with Russian parents and a grandmother from Kharkiv who spent two years in Donetsk and Kyiv working on human rights with the United Nations, said that she “always felt that speaking fluent Russian was enough to engage with the country”. Now, she believes, it’s important “to be able to listen to Ukrainians in whichever language they prefer to speak, to allow them the freedom of not having to revert to the lingua franca if they choose not to”.

Some learners see studying Ukrainian as a way to help the country rebuild. Abby Davis, an IT project management consultant based in Atlanta, lived in Druzhkivka, a town in Ukraine’s largely Russian-speaking eastern Donbas region, as a “bilingual tot” in the 90s with her missionary family. She hopes to apply her skills to strengthen the country’s IT infrastructure and has been using the Pimsleur app to learn some conversational Ukrainian “to be ready to help”.

Several learning platforms have extended special offers related to Ukraine. [LingQ](#) is offering free access to Ukrainian lessons and free premium accounts for Ukrainians studying other languages. [MyCoolClass](#), a teacher-owned cooperative, has [waived fees](#) and simplified the application process for Ukrainian teachers using its platform. Duolingo has pledged to donate all ad revenue generated by learners of Ukrainian to relief efforts “for at least the next year”.

Richards still plans to settle in Kyiv when it’s safe to do so, and hopes to be able to converse in Ukrainian when he does.

“It feels like the war has changed everything,” he said. “Ukrainian has become a symbol of heritage, survival, strength and resistance.”

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HEADLINE	04/07 Italy fears economic hit Russians stay away
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/07/italy-economy-russian-tourists-ukraine
GIST	<p>In the window of a tobacco shop in the eastern Tuscan town of Arezzo is a yellow sign with red letters reading “We only accept payment in roubles”.</p> <p>“It’s just a provocation,” said Anthony Brucato, the shop owner, noting that the same window displayed the blue and yellow flag of Ukraine and a drawing of a dove with a peace flag in its beak. “I want to make people talk about what’s happening. There are a few leaders making decisions that have an impact on millions. This is crazy.”</p>

While Brucato said he was critical of Russia's invasion of its southern neighbour, he admits his shop window could be seen as showing a mixed message. It's not alone.

Italy's government stands squarely with other EU nations in opposing Russia's war in Ukraine. Italy has imposed sanctions on the Russian economy, stopped dealing with its banks, and called for a negotiated settlement to the conflict.

Opinion polls show that between 80 and 90% of Italians support the government's stance, according to the polling firm Opinioni, a number that could tick higher as evidence of Russian atrocities in the Ukrainian city of Bucha come to light.

Yet the country continues to rely heavily on the import of Russian gas, though the Italian prime minister, Mario Draghi, flatly refused demands to pay for that gas in roubles – a move in a geopolitical chess game that inspired Brucato's yellow sign.

Analysts say the absence of Russian imports of Italian goods and of Russian visitors may threaten to derail Italy's fragile post-pandemic economic recovery. In late March, the Economist Intelligence Unit reduced its economic growth estimates all across the EU but said Italy would be hit the hardest, with growth slowing to 3.4% this year from a previous estimate of 4.4% because of the hit to trade with Russia and secondary impacts such as rising fuel costs and supply chain issues. That was in line with Italy's National Statistics Institute saying last week that further downward adjustments could be in the works if the war continued.

On Tuesday Micaela Pallini, the president of the wine sector association Federvini, said the war in Ukraine could create "irreversible long-term impacts" for Italian winemakers. She said the devastation and the humanitarian crisis remained the top concerns in Ukraine, but also noted that Italy was the top supplier of wine in Ukraine and Russia, with combined sales of about €400m (£335m) last year, about 6% of Italy's wine exports. That will be reduced dramatically this year.

Producers of luxury goods including clothing, jewellery and accessories said they were expecting similar downturns in exports. Forte dei Marmi, a coastal resort that caters to Russian buyers and visitors, reportedly put expansion plans on hold days after the start of the war.

Italy's tourism sector, already reeling from lockdowns and quarantines over the past two years, will be hit even harder, according to Michele Costabile, a professor of business and management at Luiss University in Rome. He noted that while Russians barely cracked the top 20 for numbers of visitors to Italy, in terms of time spent in the country they were ninth, and when measured by overall economic impact they were second, behind only Germany.

"Traditionally the average Russian visitor stayed in Italy for five or more days, compared to two or three from most other countries, and they spent around 65% more money per day than the average tourist," Costabile said. "I assure you, the absence of Russian visitors in the sector will be felt."

Marc Antonio Esposito, a clerk in a high-end watch store in Rome, said the impacts of the war had been obvious from the start.

"The watches we sell start at around €5,000 and go much higher," Esposito said. "We had enough wealthy Russian customers that we hired a Russian-speaking associate. But I don't think I've seen more than two or three Russians since the start of the year."

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HEADLINE	04/07 West escalates pressure on Russia
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/07/world/ukraine-russia-war-news

BRUSSELS — Western nations on Thursday escalated their pressure on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, with the European Union approving a ban on Russian coal and the United States moving to strip Russia's trading privileges and prohibit its energy sales in the American market.

The new punishments came as the United Nations General Assembly took a symbolically important vote to penalize Russia by suspending it from the Human Rights Council, the 47-member U.N. body that can investigate rights abuses. Western diplomats called the suspension a barometer of global outrage over the war and the growing evidence of atrocities committed by Russian forces.

That evidence includes newly revealed radio transmissions intercepted by German intelligence in which Russian forces discussed carrying out indiscriminate killings north of Kyiv, the capital, according to two officials briefed on an intelligence report. Russia has denied any responsibility for atrocities.

Together, the steps announced Thursday represented a significant increase in efforts led by Western nations to isolate and inflict greater economic pain on Russia as its troops regroup for a wave of attacks in eastern Ukraine, prompting urgent calls by Ukrainian officials for civilians there to flee.

"These next few days may be your last chance to leave!" the regional governor of Luhansk, Serhiy Haidai, declared in a video on Facebook. "The enemy is trying to cut off all possible ways to leave. Do not delay — evacuate."

But the Western penalties were unlikely to persuade Russia to stop the war, and they revealed how the allies were trying to minimize their own economic pain and prevent themselves from becoming entangled in a direct armed conflict with Moscow.

In some ways, the efforts underscored internal tensions among Russia's critics over how best to manage the next stage of the conflict, which has created the biggest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II. The war is also indirectly worsening humanitarian and economic problems far from Ukraine, including rising food and energy prices that are exacerbating hunger and inflation, particularly in developing nations.

It took two days of protracted talks in Brussels for the European Union to approve a fifth round of sanctions against Russia that included its first ban on a Russian energy source, coal. But the measures were softened by several caveats, highlighting Europe's diminishing appetite to absorb further economic fallout from the war.

The ban would be phased in over four months, instead of three as originally proposed, according to E.U. diplomats. Germany had been pushing for a longer transition period to wind down existing contracts, even though Russian coal is easier to replace with purchases from other suppliers, compared with oil and gas.

European diplomats also agreed to ban Russian-flagged vessels from E.U. ports, block trucks from Russia and its ally, Belarus, from E.U. roads, and stop the import of Russian seafood, cement, wood and liquor and the export to Russia of quantum computers and advanced semiconductors.

Ukrainian officials had urged Western nations to go further and completely cut off purchases of Russian oil and gas, contending that existing sanctions would not cripple Russia's economy quickly or severely enough to affect President Vladimir V. Putin's campaign to subjugate Ukraine by force.

"As long as the West continues buying Russian gas and oil, it is supporting Ukraine with one hand while supporting the Russian war machine with the other hand," Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said Thursday at NATO headquarters in Brussels, where he urged members of the alliance to accelerate promised help to Ukraine's outgunned military.

The NATO secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, said the alliance would "further strengthen and sustain our support to Ukraine, so that Ukraine prevails in the face of Russia's invasion." But he did not offer details.

At the United Nations, the General Assembly's resolution suspending Russia from the Human Rights Council, a step advocated by the United States and its allies, was the strongest measure the organization has taken to castigate the Kremlin.

Although the decision carries little practical impact, Russia's suspension, approved on a 93 to 24 vote, with 58 countries abstaining, was still a diplomatic slap that Russia, one of the United Nations' founding members, had hoped to avoid.

"The country that's perpetrating gross and systematic violations of human rights should not sit on a body whose job it is to protect those rights," Antony J. Blinken, the secretary of state, said at NATO headquarters.

Russia, which resigned its seat on the Human Rights Council in protest, denounced the vote as "an attempt by the U.S. to maintain its domination and total control" and to "use human rights colonialism in international relations."

China, Cuba, North Korea, Iran, Syria and Vietnam were among the countries that joined Russia in opposing the measure, while India, Brazil, South Africa and Mexico were among those that abstained. Some of those countries argued the move could worsen the war, and called for further investigation of reports of Russian atrocities.

The last country to lose its seat on the panel was Libya in 2011, after President Moammar al-Qaddafi launched a ferocious crackdown on antigovernment protesters.

Russia remains one of five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council with a veto power that it has already used to block a resolution calling on it to stop the war and withdraw its forces.

As U.N. members were deliberating, the United States Senate voted unanimously to strip Moscow of its preferential trade status and to ban the import of Russian energy into the United States. The legislation would allow the United States to impose higher tariffs on Russian goods. Russian energy, however, represents only a small fraction of American imports, and Moscow is already having trouble exporting its oil.

The House approved the bills later on Thursday, sending them to President Biden, who was expected to sign them.

The latest efforts to punish Russia over the Feb. 24 invasion were energized partly by international outrage over the discovery of many dead civilians by Ukrainian soldiers who reclaimed areas north of Kyiv that had been vacated by retreating Russian forces.

Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, has said hundreds of bodies including children were found, many of them in the suburb of Bucha, and that many victims had been bound, tortured and shot in the head.

Mr. Kuleba, Ukraine's foreign minister, was asked at NATO headquarters about reports of atrocities that may have been committed by Ukrainian troops.

He said he had heard about, but not seen, a video showing a group of Ukrainian soldiers killing captured Russian troops outside a village west of Kyiv. The video has been verified by The New York Times.

Mr. Kuleba said his country's military observes the rules of warfare and would investigate any "isolated incidents" of atrocities.

"You don't understand how it feels that Russian soldiers rape children," he said. "This is not an excuse to those who violate the rules of warfare on either side of the front line. But there are some things which you simply can't understand. I'm sorry."

Mr. Blinken spoke with disgust about the atrocities attributed to Russian soldiers, saying “the sickening images and accounts coming out of Bucha and other parts of Ukraine have only strengthened our collective resolve.”

“The revulsion against what the Russian government is doing is palpable,” he said.

Russia has described evidence of the Bucha killings by Russian forces — including satellite images verified by The New York Times that show bodies on streets while still under Russian occupation — as fabricated.

Mr. Kuleba said the expected Russian assaults on the eastern regions of Luhansk and Donetsk made it more urgent that NATO members expedite delivery of weapons to help Ukraine defend itself.

“The discussion is not about the list of weapons,” Mr. Kuleba said. “The discussion is about the timeline. When do we get them?”

Mr. Blinken did not offer any new details on military assistance.

He noted that the United States had supplied Ukraine with arms for months, totaling more than \$1.7 billion since Russia’s invasion began. That aid includes an additional \$100 million worth of Javelin anti-tank missiles that the Biden administration approved for shipment this week.

Mr. Blinken expressed skepticism about the peace talks between Russia and Ukraine, saying he had “heard nothing from the Russians suggesting that they’re serious” about a negotiated settlement.

The mayor of the eastern city of Sloviansk, Vadim Lyakh, said it was “preparing for the worst” and stocking bomb shelters and hospitals with medical supplies and food.

“We have been watching closely how the Russians have encircled and seized nearby cities like Mariupol and Izium,” he said referring to two Ukrainian cities devastated by Russian attacks. “It’s clear that these cities were not evacuated in time, but in Sloviansk we have some notice, and that’s why we are actively pushing people to leave.”

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HEADLINE	04/07 EU approves import ban on Russia coal
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/06/business/russia-coal-europe.html
GIST	<p>European leaders, seeking to punish Russia for reports of atrocities carried out in Ukraine, on Thursday approved a ban on Russian coal, the imported energy source that would be the easiest to replace.</p> <p>Initially expected to arrive on Wednesday but delayed by extended deliberations among European Union officials, the latest round of sanctions from the bloc included a plan for cutting off Russian coal over four months. The original proposal had suggested a shorter, three-month withdrawal.</p> <p>The slight slowdown in the decision-making process reflected the challenges of reaching agreement among all 27 member nations on the penalties, particularly given that some countries in the bloc are more reliant on Russian energy than others. Sanctions need to be approved by all member states.</p> <p>And there were concerns that cutting off coal supplies could cause more harm to the European Union than to Russia. Though the European Union depends on Russian coal, the bloc could replace it more easily with imports from other countries than it could replace natural gas and oil. But banning coal from Russia could send energy prices soaring for European consumers, given the existing shortages in the bloc, according to Rystad Energy, a consulting firm. Carlos Torres Diaz, a senior vice president at Rystad, called the potential sanctions “a double-edged sword.”</p>

Imports from Russia accounted for 47 percent of coal coming into the European Union in 2019, according to the European Union's statistics office, Eurostat, making the country the most important supplier of the fuel. That amounts to four billion euros worth of coal annually, Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission president, said.

Each member state has different energy needs, and among those most dependent on Russian energy overall is Germany, the bloc's largest economy. Roughly half of all coal that Germany imports comes from Russia, last year totaling €2.2 billion, according to government figures. Most is used to generate electricity and power Germany's steel industry.

Lignite, or brown coal, the only fossil fuel that is still mined in Germany, is burned to generate power. It is also the dirtiest fossil fuel, lending urgency to efforts to cease burning coal. But 2021 proved to be less windy than expected, hurting the country's wind power efforts and leading to a nearly 5 percent increase in coal-generated power for the year.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government laid out plans last year for the country to quit coal by the start of the next decade, and in the past month, Robert Habeck, the vice chancellor and economy minister, has said Germany will aim to wean itself off Russian coal by the end of the summer.

"How we will carry out a coal embargo is well prepared," Mr. Habeck said Wednesday.

Diplomats in Brussels said Germany and other countries had been asking during negotiations for more time to complete current orders and wind down existing contracts before enforcing the measure.

German companies have already renegotiated contracts with other countries that export coal, Mr. Habeck said. But shipments that have already been ordered and are underway from Russia would not be stopped or turned back, he added. "If we turned those ships back, then we could face a shortage," he told reporters in Berlin.

Coal from the United States, Colombia and South Africa could help plug the gap left by cutting out imports from Russia, according to the German Coal Importer Association, an industry group representing companies that depend on coal supplies from abroad.

In a telephone call on Wednesday, Mr. Scholz and the president of Colombia, Iván Duque Márquez, discussed the war in Ukraine and energy, the chancellor's office said.

Australia provided nearly one-third of the European Union's coal imports in 2019. Australian markets have already reported a surge in their coal prices, as companies in Europe have turned to them to inquire about fuel.

Poland is the E.U. country that still relies most heavily on coal. While much of the country's coal is mined domestically, roughly 20 percent was imported from Russia last year.

Last month, Poland's prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, proposed legislation to ban imports of coal from Russia.

Cutting off Russia's oil and natural gas will prove to be much more difficult. Germany has already reduced its dependence on gas from Russia by 15 percent in the first three months of the year, according to Mr. Habeck. But industry leaders have warned against imposing sanctions on Russian natural gas, saying it could lead to substantial job losses in the chemical, mining and pharmaceutical sectors.

Mr. Habeck presented draft legislation for speeding up Germany's expansion of renewable energy, focused on generating more through wind and solar power.

But it will take several years before new terminals are built that would allow for liquefied natural gas to arrive by ship, offering a replacement for Russian gas coming via pipeline. And even if the approval

	processes are streamlined, it could take years before the terminals are able to replace the nearly 22 percent of Germany's energy mix that comes from natural gas.
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HEADLINE	04/07 First Black woman on Supreme Court
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/07/us/politics/ketanji-brown-jackson-supreme-court.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Senate on Thursday confirmed Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Supreme Court, making her the first Black woman to be elevated to the pinnacle of the judicial branch in what her supporters hailed as a needed step toward bringing new diversity and life experience to the court.</p> <p>Overcoming a concerted effort by Republicans to sully her record and derail her nomination, Judge Jackson was confirmed on a 53-to-47 vote, with three Republicans joining all 50 members of the Democratic caucus in backing her.</p> <p>The vote was a rejection of Republican attempts to paint her as a liberal extremist who had coddled criminals. Dismissing those portrayals as distorted and offensive, Judge Jackson's backers saw the confirmation as an uplifting occasion for the Senate and a mark of how far the country had come.</p> <p>Judge Jackson, whose parents attended segregated schools, has two degrees from Harvard University and, at 51, is now in line to replace Justice Stephen G. Breyer when he retires at the end of the court's session this summer, making her a justice in waiting.</p> <p>"Even in the darkest times, there are bright lights," Senator Chuck Schumer, Democrat of New York and the majority leader, said on the Senate floor. "Today is one of the brightest lights. Let us hope it's a metaphor, an indication of many bright lights to come."</p> <p>He added, "How many millions of kids in generations past could have benefited from such a role model?"</p> <p>At the Capitol, the galleries, closed for much of the pandemic, were filled with supporters on hand to witness the historic vote. The chamber erupted in cheers, with senators, staff and visitors all jumping to their feet for a lengthy standing ovation, when the vote was announced.</p> <p>"After weeks and weeks of racist, misogynistic and stomach-churning attacks, we cannot wait to finally call her Justice Jackson," said Derrick Johnson, the president of the N.A.A.C.P., describing the moment as one of "enormous consequence to our nation and to history."</p> <p>Not everyone shared in the joy of the day. As applause echoed from the marbled walls, Senator Mitch McConnell, Republican of Kentucky and the minority leader, turned his back and slowly walked out, as did most of the few Republicans remaining on the floor, leaving half of the chamber empty as the other half celebrated in a stark reflection of the partisan divide.</p> <p>"When it came to one of the most consequential decisions a president can make, a lifetime appointment to our highest court, the Biden administration let the radicals run the show," Mr. McConnell had said earlier, making one last argument against Judge Jackson, whose nomination he framed as an example of extremists taking control of the Democratic Party. "The far left got the reckless inflationary spending they wanted. The far left has gotten the insecure border they wanted. And today, the far left will get the Supreme Court justice they wanted."</p> <p>Three Republicans — Senators Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Mitt Romney of Utah — crossed party lines to vote to confirm Judge Jackson, lending a modicum of bipartisanship to an otherwise bitterly polarized process.</p> <p>It was a sign of the deeply divided times that winning over three Republicans was considered something of a victory. When Justice Breyer — nominated by President Bill Clinton — was confirmed in 1994, it was</p>

by a 87-to-9 vote, in line with prevailing sentiment at the time that presidents were entitled to their chosen justice, provided the nominee was qualified and temperamentally suited to the job.

But in recent years, Supreme Court confirmation fights have become political blood sport, featuring combative televised hearings in which senators of the opposite party seek to tarnish the reputation of the president's nominee, while making partisan appeals to their core supporters.

Confirmations have fallen almost entirely along partisan lines. Democrats uniformly opposed Justice Amy Coney Barrett, President Donald J. Trump's third nominee to the court, who was rushed through just before the 2020 election, and only one of them voted to confirm his second, Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh, whose explosive hearings included an allegation of sexual assault.

In 2017, Justice Neil M. Gorsuch, Mr. Trump's first nominee, received three Democratic votes — the same level of bipartisanship as Judge Jackson — but his nomination came only after Republicans had blocked President Barack Obama from filling a Supreme Court seat a year earlier, refusing to grant a hearing to his nominee, Merrick B. Garland, during an election year.

Judge Jackson's confirmation was a major achievement for President Biden, who had promised at a low point during his 2020 primary campaign that he would appoint a Black woman to the Supreme Court at his first opportunity. As a former public defender, Judge Jackson is the leading example of the emphasis the administration has put on expanding not only the personal diversity of the courts, but the professional as well. She will be the first ever public defender to serve as a Supreme Court justice.

Vice President Kamala Harris, the first Black woman to hold the position and one of just 11 Black senators in American history, presided over the vote — one historic figure presiding over the elevation of another — as senators stated their positions from their desks in a reflection of the magnitude of the moment. More than a dozen members of the Congressional Black Caucus, including Representative Hakeem Jeffries, Democrat of New York, and Representative Joyce Beatty, Democrat of Ohio, clustered on the Senate floor to mark the occasion.

At the White House, Mr. Biden and Judge Jackson watched the vote together from the Roosevelt Room, embracing and taking selfies in front of a television screen displaying the final vote count. Officials said the two would appear at an event on Friday to mark Judge Jackson's confirmation, though she will not be sworn in for months.

"I'm overjoyed, deeply moved," Ms. Harris told reporters after the vote. "There's so much about what's happening in the world now that is presenting some of the worst of this moment and human behaviors. And then we have a moment like this."

That moment was orchestrated by the White House and Democrats, who, given their precarious hold on the evenly split Senate, wanted to move as quickly as they could after Justice Breyer announced his retirement plans in February to put in place a successor.

Mr. Schumer had urged the White House to move swiftly in filling the seat even before it became vacant, warning that he was only one illness or senatorial absence away from losing his majority and the ability to deliver a confirmation to the president.

"One member and we don't have it," Mr. Schumer said in an interview, recounting his message to White House officials. "I wanted to be fair, but I wanted to be expeditious. We couldn't stretch this out."

Faced with a historic pick who would not change the ideological divide of the court, top Senate Republicans initially promised a respectful review of her record to show they could scrutinize a judicial nominee without personal attacks.

But as the hearings approached, Republicans sharpened their tone.

Mr. McConnell took strong issue with her refusal to take a position on proposals to add seats to the Supreme Court — a priority of progressive groups that were enthusiastic backers of Judge Jackson.

Senator Josh Hawley, a Missouri Republican with presidential ambitions, claimed misleadingly that a review of her sentencing record in child sex abuse cases showed a pattern of handing down penalties lighter than recommended by prosecutors.

Republicans also faulted her for representing terror detainees at the military prison in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, as an appointed public defender and signing court papers that accused President George W. Bush of committing war crimes for torturing detainees.

“She is an extreme outlier on the question of crime,” Senator Ted Cruz, Republican of Texas, told reporters at a news conference in the Capitol not long before the vote, reiterating attacks that have been debunked by several independent analysts, who note that Judge Jackson’s sentencing record is well within the mainstream.

Senator Marsha Blackburn, Republican of Tennessee, claimed that “the dark money leftist groups” supporting Judge Jackson were “trying to push this agenda of woke education.”

The few Republicans who backed Judge Jackson rejected such criticisms, as well as what Ms. Murkowski called the “corrosive politicization” of the Supreme Court confirmation process.

While Democrats had the votes to confirm Judge Jackson on their own if their caucus united behind her, they wanted some Republican backing, particularly for a historic pick. Senator Richard J. Durbin, Democrat of Illinois and the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, worked quietly to bring some Republicans on board and the White House made Judge Jackson available to potential G.O.P. supporters both before and after the hearings.

A turning point came last week when Ms. Collins announced she would back the nominee after a second sit-down with the judge to clear up some issues that arose during the hearings. Ms. Murkowski, whose decision was complicated by a difficult re-election race, and Mr. Romney soon followed.

By Thursday, the outcome of the vote was not in doubt, but it dragged on for almost 30 minutes because Senator Rand Paul, Republican of Kentucky, was not present on the floor. Once he had arrived, Mr. Paul cast his “no” vote from the Senate cloak room because he was dressed too casually to meet the jacket-and-tie dress code for the chamber.

When Ms. Harris called the vote, Mr. Romney stood to join Democrats in applauding, but many Republicans had already departed.

The dismissive attitude was in keeping with the hostile treatment Judge Jackson received during her confirmation hearings, in which she was questioned about her religion, her views on critical race theory, and even the definition of “woman.”

But on Thursday, her supporters were ebullient.

“Nobody’s going to steal my joy,” Senator Raphael Warnock, Democrat of Georgia, said in remarks ahead of the vote. “I’m a senator, I’m a pastor. But beyond all that, I’m the father of a young Black girl.” He said Judge Jackson’s ascension to the nation’s highest court exemplified “the promise of progress on which our democracy rests.”

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HEADLINE	04/07 Pakistan court blocks PM; orders vote
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/07/world/asia/pakistan-imran-khan.html
GIST	ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — Pakistan’s Supreme Court on Thursday overturned Prime Minister Imran Khan’s move to dissolve Parliament , setting the stage for a no-confidence vote widely expected to

remove him from office and offering a major victory to opposition leaders, who said that Mr. Khan had attempted an “open coup.”

[Mr. Khan](#), the international cricket-star-turned-politician, and his allies [dissolved Parliament](#) on Sunday, effectively blocking [a no-confidence vote](#). The move plunged the country into a constitutional crisis and sharply escalated the political instability that has embroiled Pakistan for weeks.

The recent developments have revived fears of unrest in the nuclear-armed nation of 220 million that has experienced repeated military coups since its founding 75 years ago.

The prospect of Mr. Khan being ousted by opposition parties, former allies and defectors from within his own party in Parliament is likely to damage his ability to rally widespread support ahead of the next elections. While no prime minister in Pakistan has ever completed a full five-year term in office, Mr. Khan would be the first to be removed in a no-confidence vote.

In its verdict Thursday, the court agreed that the move violated the Constitution and ordered the no-confidence vote take place on Saturday morning. If he loses that vote, as expected, an interim government will be formed and the country will prepare for elections in the coming months.

The ruling seemed to turn the political tides for the opposition parties, which had been taken aback when Mr. Khan evaded the no-confidence vote on Sunday. In the days since, Mr. Khan, a populist leader, had dominated the political narrative and rallied support around his allegations of an American-led conspiracy against him.

Now, it is likely that both the opposition and Mr. Khan must turn their attention to new elections. They will be a referendum on Mr. Khan’s political brinkmanship after a public rebuke to his leadership from both the country’s courts and lawmakers, including some of his political allies.

“Imran Khan will lose face,” said Ayesha Siddiqi, a research associate at SOAS University of London. “It will become very clear that he lost the confidence of the Parliament, including members of his own party.”

The elections will also test whether the coalition of opposition parties — typically at loggerheads, but teaming up around the goal of the no-confidence vote — can remain united.

In a country where the military controls the main levers of power, the elections are also widely seen as an opportunity for military leaders to choose and elevate new political partners.

“Pakistani politics has two parallel strands,” said Arifa Noor, an Islamabad-based political analyst.

“One is public support, and the other is military. One without the other doesn’t land you in the big seat.”

Moments after the court issued its ruling, opposition supporters flooded the street outside the Supreme Court in Islamabad and erupted in cheers. Pumping their fists in the air, they shouted: “Long live the Constitution!” and “Go Imran Go!”

Speaking to reporters, the opposition leader Shehbaz Sharif said that the top court’s decision has saved the country and maintained its independence.

“The court definitely fulfilled the people’s expectations,” Mr. Sharif said.

In an apparent effort to plot his next move, Mr. Khan convened a meeting of his cabinet and top political committee in parliament on Friday, and plans to address the nation Friday evening, according to Fawad Chaudhry, the information minister.

Mr. Khan, 69, came to power on a nationalist platform and pledges to tackle corruption. His popularity has taken a hit in recent months as inflation has surged. His relationship with key military leaders also soured after he refused to back the appointment of a new chief of the country's intelligence agency last year.

Last month, a coalition of opposition parties called for a no-confidence motion and secured the votes needed to win. But minutes before the vote was to take place on Sunday, Mr. Khan's allies in the National Assembly blocked it and announced that he planned to dissolve the body, a move he later confirmed in a televised speech. He also called for early elections.

Hours later, Mr. Khan and his allies justified his moves by asserting that the opposition was conspiring with the United States government to oust him. American officials have denied involvement in the campaign to remove Mr. Khan.

In recent days, Mr. Khan has tried to use such accusations to whip up support among his core base and draw people into the streets — offering a glimpse of the approach he will most likely use to attract public support ahead of the general elections.

On Monday night, thousands gathered in Islamabad at a political rally for Mr. Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party. Men and women draped the party flag around their shoulders or hoisted it in the air while party leaders rallied the crowd.

Standing atop a platform above the crowd, the defense minister, Pervez Khattak, shouted, "The youth will go to every street of the country to convey the message that they will oust traitors, and Imran Khan has promised that the country will not be a slave!"

The crowd erupted in applause. Below him, a group of women began chanting: "Traitors! Traitors! Traitors!"

If the no-confidence vote proceeds as expected and Mr. Khan is voted out, then many expect Mr. Sharif, the younger brother of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and a former chief minister of Punjab Province, to become interim prime minister.

The country's election commission, an independent federal body responsible for organizing and conducting elections to the national Parliament, announced on Thursday that general elections could be held in October at the earliest.

It is unclear how Mr. Khan would fare in elections without the full backing of the country's military, which was widely seen as having undermined the 2018 elections to pave the way for his victory. Mr. Khan has denied that accusation, as has the military.

The Supreme Court's ruling on Thursday also casts doubt on his political narrative that the United States conspired to oust him from power, and it is likely to cost him public support.

"This is a more significant political blow to Imran Khan than a mere vote of no-confidence loss would have been, especially as it dents his U.S. regime change conspiracy narrative," said Asfandiyar Mir, a senior expert at the United States Institute of Peace.

Still, the fallout from Mr. Khan's recent bid to remain in power could have long-lasting consequences.

Amid the turmoil, the Pakistani rupee sank to an all-time low on Thursday. And the current crisis has further polarized the country and could escalate into unrest ahead of the upcoming elections, analysts say.

	“I’m not sure how an election campaign in which people are really charged up, and there’s a high level of intolerance, remains peaceful,” said Ijaz Khan, former chairman of the department of international relations at the University of Peshawar. “I have a real fear there will be more violence.”
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HEADLINE	04/08 China lockdowns block truckers, shipments
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/08/business/lockdowns-in-china-block-truck-shipments-and-close-factories.html
GIST	<p>BEIJING — China’s mounting Covid-19 restrictions are creating further disruptions to global supply chains for consumer electronics, car parts and other goods.</p> <p>A growing number of Chinese cities are requiring truck drivers to take daily Covid P.C.R. tests before allowing them to cross municipal borders or are quarantining drivers deemed to be at risk of infection. The measures have limited how quickly drivers can move components among factories and goods from plants to ports.</p> <p>Shanghai and other major Chinese cities have imposed lengthy, stringent lockdowns to try to control Covid outbreaks. Previous interruptions in the supply of goods from Chinese factories to buyers around the world mainly involved the temporary closure of shipping ports, including in Shenzhen in southeastern China in May and June last year and then near Shanghai last summer.</p> <p>“The problem is not ships, it’s that there’s no cargo coming because there are no trucks,” said Jarrod Ward, the chief East Asia business development officer in the Shanghai office of Yusen Logistics, a large Japanese supply chain management company.</p> <p>The testing of truck drivers has been held up because some cities are doing mass testing of residents. Shanghai tested essentially all 25 million people within its borders in a single day on Monday and detected another 21,000 cases on Thursday.</p> <p>Now, there is an acute shortage of truck drivers in Shanghai and in nearby cities like Kunshan, a center of electronics production. Many electronics components manufacturers are shutting down in Kunshan.</p> <p>“The key electronics suppliers to Apple, to Tesla, they’re all based there,” said Julie Gerdeman, the chief executive of Everstream, a supply chain risk management affiliate of DHL that is based in San Marcos, Calif.</p> <p>Apple declined to comment, and Tesla had no immediate reply to questions.</p> <p>Many factories have tried to stay open by having workers stay on site instead of going home. Employees have been sleeping on mats on the floor for as long as four weeks in some cities in northeastern China. Companies have been storing goods in nearby warehouses while waiting for normal truck traffic to resume.</p> <p>But as lockdowns stretch on in cities like Shanghai, Changchun and Shenyang, factories are starting to run out of materials to assemble. Some are sending their workers home until further notice.</p> <p>Making car seats, for example, requires different springs, bolts and other materials. Mr. Ward said car seat producers have run out of components. Volkswagen said the company closed a factory outside of Shanghai.</p> <p>While Shanghai’s cases increase, its main rival in electronics manufacturing, Shenzhen, has emerged from lockdown. That is freeing workers and factories there to resume full-speed production.</p> <p>Retailers and manufacturers in the West have tried to adapt to previous supply chain difficulties in China by switching from ships to air freight, but air freight rates have more than doubled from last year.</p>

	<p>The near-total suspension of passenger flights in and out of Shanghai has roughly halved the air freight capacity there, said Zvi Schreiber, the chief executive of Freightos, a freight booking platform. The war in Ukraine has forced many airlines to schedule longer flights around Russia and Ukraine, which means each plane can make fewer trips in a week and often can carry less weight on each flight.</p> <p>The war in Ukraine is also starting to hurt the availability of Soviet-era Antonov freighters, Mr. Schreiber said. These workhorses of the air freight industry have been kept going in recent years almost entirely by Ukrainian maintenance bases that are now closed.</p> <p>For companies, any additional disruptions to the global supply chain would come at a particularly fraught moment, on top of rising prices for raw materials and shipping, along with extended delivery times and worker shortages.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Russia's growing isolation
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/07/briefing/your-friday-briefing-russias-growing-isolation.html
GIST	<p>Russia leaves U.N. rights council</p> <p>The U.N. voted to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council on Thursday, leading Russia to withdraw. China said it opposed the measure. U.S. lawmakers also voted to strip Moscow of its preferential trade status and ban the import of Russian energy. Here's the latest.</p> <p>The diplomatic pressure may continue to mount. The E.U. is weighing a ban on Russian coal, a significant step for a bloc that is heavily dependent on the country's fossil fuels. But lengthy deliberations and the dilution of some measures indicated that the E.U.'s appetite for sanctions may be diminishing.</p> <p>Fighting may soon escalate, too. NATO met to discuss sending more military aid to Ukraine, in anticipation of an intensified Russian onslaught in the east. Officials there warned civilians that they faced their "last chance to leave" and urged them to evacuate.</p> <p>Soldiers: Body bags are returning to Russia from the front, causing some families of fallen soldiers to question the war — and leading others to harden their resolve.</p> <p>Diplomacy: Prospects for successful peace talks have dimmed: Russia's foreign minister said Ukraine had proposed a new draft deal that deviated from previous versions, and President Aleksandr Lukashenko of Belarus demanded that his country be included in the negotiations.</p> <p>State of the war:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukrainian forces were holding out amid fierce fighting in Mariupol, officials said, despite a dire humanitarian situation. The mayor said 5,000 people have died there. German intelligence intercepted radio transmissions in which Russians discussed killings of civilians, officials said. Facial recognition companies are being used to identify Russian soldiers, living or dead, to verify that they are not actors and show Russians the cost of the conflict.
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HEADLINE	04/07 Shanghai seethes in Covid lockdown
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/07/world/asia/shanghai-covid-china.html
GIST	<p>Parents have organized petitions, imploring the government not to separate children infected with the coronavirus from their families. Patients have demanded to speak with higher-ups about shoddy conditions at isolation facilities. Residents have confronted officials over containment policies that they see as unfair or inhumane, then shared recordings of those arguments online.</p>

As the coronavirus races through Shanghai, in the city's [worst outbreak](#) since the pandemic began, the authorities have deployed their usual hard-nosed playbook to try and stamp out transmission, no matter the cost. What has been different is the response: an outpouring of public dissatisfaction rarely seen in China since the chaotic early days of the pandemic, in Wuhan.

The crisis in Shanghai is shaping up to be more than just a public health challenge. It is also a political test of the [zero tolerance approach](#) at large, on which the Communist Party has staked its legitimacy.

For much of the past two years, the Chinese government has [stifled most domestic criticism](#) of its [zero tolerance](#) Covid strategy, through a mixture of censorship, [arrests](#) and success at [keeping caseloads low](#). But in Shanghai, which has recorded more than 70,000 cases since March 1, that is proving more difficult.

Shanghai is China's most populous metropolis, its shimmering commercial heart. It is home to a vibrant middle class and many of China's business, cultural and academic elite. A large share of foreign-educated Chinese live in Shanghai, and residents' per capita disposable income is the [highest in the country](#). Even in a country where dissent is dangerous, many there have long [found ways](#) to demand government responsiveness and have a say over their own lives.

"I'm just too angry, too sad," said Kristine Wu, a 28-year-old employee of a tech company who was visited at home by two police officers after she criticized the city's Communist Party leader on social media. She recorded her defiant confrontation with them, in which she asked why they were wasting time harassing her, when they could be helping people in need of care. She then shared a photo of the encounter on social media, despite the officers' warnings against doing so. (It was later censored.)

"I thought, whatever, I'll just go for it," said Ms. Wu, who had not considered herself political before the lockdown. "I used to live pretty comfortably, and before anything had happened, everyone was very polite, very rule abiding. Now all that has just crumbled."

For now, the government looks largely unmoved. A Chinese vice premier visited Shanghai and [demanded](#) that officials focus on eliminating cases "without hesitation." Public health experts have warned that China is unprepared to live with the coronavirus, with [just over half](#) of people aged 80 and over fully vaccinated as of late March. In addition, China's leader, Xi Jinping, has held up the country's suppression of the virus as proof of the superiority of his governance model; maintaining that line will be especially important this year, when he is expected to claim an unprecedented third term.

But in shutting down Shanghai, an economic engine that contributes 4 percent of China's gross domestic product, the authorities have revived questions about the costs of their approach, especially in the face of the highly transmissible, relatively mild Omicron variant. If even Shanghai could be cut off, people might worry there was no limit to how far the government would go, said [Lynette Ong](#), a political scientist at the University of Toronto.

"The fact that Shanghai is being locked down suggests that we are pretty close to the red line, to the tolerable limit of how defensible zero Covid is," Professor Ong said. "This is a big city with a 25 million population, and is extremely challenging to undergo lockdown — it's pretty close to people's psychological breaking point."

For most of the pandemic, Shanghai offered an alternate vision of China's containment strategy. While other places that detected even a few cases snapped into widespread lockdowns, Shanghai isolated individual buildings. Dr. Zhang Wenhong, an infectious disease expert who helped steer the city's response, [attracted admirers nationwide](#) for advocating a more restrained approach. The Global Times, a nationalistic state-owned tabloid, [praised](#) Shanghai's "precise and targeted containment."

Even after caseloads surged to record highs last month, officials [insisted](#) that Shanghai could not be sealed off because of its economic importance.

But cases continued rising, and the central government probably grew nervous, said Yanzhong Huang, director of the Center for Global Health Studies at Seton Hall University.

“They were afraid maybe that if this situation cannot be under control in a short period of time, it’s going to threaten social and economic stability,” Dr. Huang said. “It also might derail the leadership transition in the months to come.”

The rollout of the more heavy-handed methods, however, has set off chaos, shocking a city with among the country’s highest standards of medical care. At least two people with asthma [have died](#) after being denied care by health care workers citing Covid protocols. Patients with chronic illnesses have had operations indefinitely postponed or been unable to obtain medicine, forcing them to post desperate calls for help online. Care facilities for older adults are [straining under outbreaks](#).

Whatever pride Shanghaiers had taken in their city’s response has morphed into dismay and outrage. When local officials asked residents of one neighborhood to sing patriotic songs to boost morale, they joined in a chorus of curses instead, according to footage circulated online. After the authorities confirmed that they were [separating infected children from their uninfected parents](#), a petition to allow children with mild or no symptoms to isolate at home garnered more than 24,000 signatures in three hours, before it was censored. This week, residents in the Baoshan suburb struck pots and pans and shouted “We want supplies! We don’t want to starve to death.”

Some responses have been more lighthearted, though still reflecting the dire circumstances. Three local rappers wrote a viral song about [panic-buying groceries](#).

Even city officials have expressed frustration with the new direction. In a leaked recording of a phone call between a Shanghai resident and a purported employee of the city’s Center for Disease Control, the staff member said she believed the approach to the epidemic had become politicized. (While officials did not confirm the authenticity of the recording, they [later said](#) they were investigating its contents.)

Amid continuing backlash, officials have made some concessions, this week allowing [certain infected children](#) to stay with their parents and delivery drivers to return to work.

Jin Dongyan, a virologist at the University of Hong Kong, said Shanghai’s educated, connected population was more primed than people elsewhere in China to be skeptical of the measures, especially given the lesser severity of the Omicron variant. Chinese propaganda has often emphasized the dangers of the virus.

In Shanghai, “many people have a good understanding of the disease and of the virus, and also of what is happening in other places” that have retreated from the harshest restrictions, Dr. Jin said. “They just don’t feel that this is going to work.”

Jeremy Wu, a 26-year-old Shanghai native, now wonders if he should have moved back to China from Australia, where he was in graduate school.

Mr. Wu returned to Shanghai in the fall of 2020, believing that the city would be one of the few places in China where officials would keep cases low while avoiding excessive restrictions. When his friends in the northwestern city of [Xi’an were locked down](#) earlier this year, he felt relief at being in Shanghai.

“While sympathizing with my friends, in my mind I was thinking, ‘Thank god this would never happen to Shanghai,’” Mr. Wu said.

“What a ‘da lian’ moment that is for me,” he added, using Chinese slang to suggest hitting oneself in the face when proven wrong.

Still, for all the dissatisfaction within Shanghai, support for zero Covid remains high in much of China. Nationalist social media users have accused the city of arrogance or lack of patriotism for pursuing its own approach at first. Even in Shanghai, some have said the city should have locked down sooner.

	<p>The central government has leaned into propaganda about the need for drastic steps in Shanghai, recently deploying more than 2,000 military medics and thousands more medical professionals from other provinces to the city.</p> <p>Chen Daoyin, a former assistant professor at the Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, said Beijing had clearly doubled down on zero Covid, and was bringing Shanghai in line with the rest of the country.</p> <p>“In a system like China’s, where politics determines everything,” he said, “it’s impossible for you to walk a different road.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 Puerto Rico: power still out for 440,000
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/07/us/puerto-rico-power-outage.html
GIST	<p>Days after an islandwide power failure struck Puerto Rico, in the latest breakdown of a perennially troubled electrical grid, nearly half a million customers remained in the dark early Friday.</p> <p>Power was being slowly restored, but more than 440,000 customers continued to lack electricity, out of a total of more than 1.4 million customers, according to poweroutage.us, which tracks power interruptions.</p> <p>For Puerto Rico’s 3.2 million people, the islandwide loss of power was a frustrating continuation of hardships brought by an unreliable electric grid. The problems have persisted even after a private Canadian-American consortium, Luma, took over electricity transmission and distribution from Puerto Rico’s public utility last June with a pledge to reduce the frequency of outages.</p> <p>Luma said in an announcement on Thursday that “the energy grid has suffered a massive island wide outage, potentially caused by a failed circuit breaker at Costa Sur power plant.” The facility produces the most electricity on the island.</p> <p>Video footage circulating on social media showed a fire burning at one of the power substations in Costa Sur, on the island’s southeastern coast. The exact cause of the power failure, which occurred after 8 p.m. Eastern time on Wednesday, remained under investigation, Luma said in a statement Thursday. The company said there was “extensive damage” to the facility.</p> <p>The Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority, known as PREPA, tweeted an image of the charred substation on Thursday, showing some of its components to be completely blackened.</p> <p>Luma is “not in position to provide an estimate of full restoration at this time,” the company said in a statement Thursday afternoon. Efforts to restore power would continue into Friday, it said.</p> <p>Public school was canceled again on Friday, but some government agencies required essential personnel to report to work. An estimated 182,000 water and sewer customers — around 10 percent — were also without water on Thursday as a result of the blackout.</p> <p>Gov. Pedro R. Pierluisi issued a series of updates on social media, urging people to “remain calm” and wait for official updates from government agencies and Luma.</p> <p>In 2017, Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico, knocking out electricity across the entire island and further exposing the vulnerability of the already fragile power grid. Some residents were left without electricity for more than a year.</p> <p>Officials have attributed past power failures to animals — one time a cat and in another instance an iguana, according to The Associated Press.</p>

	<p>Last year, Puerto Rico privatized its electrical grid and awarded Luma a 15-year contract with an annual fee of \$115 million to take over transmission and distribution operations from the beleaguered and bankrupt PREPA. The public utility is still involved in electricity generation.</p> <p>When Luma took over, company officials said that they were prepared to handle emergencies and hurricanes. However, widespread blackouts have continued and have lasted longer than they did under PREPA.</p> <p>Rafael Hernandez, the speaker of Puerto Rico’s House of Representatives, said in a tweet that a public corporation administered by Puerto Rican providers, like PREPA, could “work more effectively than the current energy system.” He called for Luma’s ouster, saying that there were “thousands of families suffering” from the outage.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 IRS warns of delayed refunds for millions
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/7/irs-warns-delayed-refunds-millions-americans-blame/
GIST	<p>The IRS admitted Thursday that millions of Americans would likely see a delay in receiving their tax refunds this year because of a worker shortage and document backlogs at the agency.</p> <p>IRS Commissioner Charles Rettig told the Senate Finance Committee that his organization had implemented mandatory overtime for its employees to speed up the processing of returns, but lingering problems exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic are still likely to delay tax refunds.</p> <p>“The IRS is serving more people and entities in a global environment than ever before while handling new and bigger responsibilities,” Mr. Rettig said. “At the same time, we have experienced delays in updating our IT systems, which means the IRS and taxpayers must continue to use certain paper-based processes.”</p> <p>He blamed the ongoing fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and the huge number of taxpayers who still file handwritten returns for slowing down IRS work.</p> <p>Republicans said the issues afflicting the agency are not the result of the coronavirus pandemic, but rather mismanagement and poor planning.</p> <p>“This is not simply a problem of taxpayers choosing to deluge the IRS with paper-filed returns,” said Sen. Mike Crapo of Idaho, the top Republican on the committee. “In many cases, IRS forms and schedules simply cannot be electronically filed, including where a taxpayer could e-file and attempts to do so but is rejected by the IRS ‘confusing digital signature process.’”</p> <p>Sen. Chuck Grassley, Iowa Republican, noted that the IRS had been given \$4.5 billion since 1999 to modernize and build out its information technology infrastructure. To date, the agency is still using systems created nearly 60 years ago.</p> <p>“Given this history, how can Congress have any confidence additional funds will result in the IRS successfully replacing this 1960-era system,” Mr. Grassley said.</p> <p>Democrats defended the IRS, saying the agency is not to blame for circumstances wracking its ability to deliver tax refunds promptly. They blamed GOP budgets for the past decade for hamstringing the IRS’ performance.</p> <p>“If you’re frustrated by poor customer service from the IRS, you have years and years of Republican cuts that have contributed mightily to the ability of the agency to meet your expectations,” said Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden, Oregon Democrat.</p> <p>IRS officials say that the majority of its problems result from taxpayers’ continued reliance on filing returns in paper format, rather than virtually. Paper returns have to be reviewed by staff and hand scanned</p>

into the agency's system for refunds to be processed. They blame the handwritten return for causing a massive backlog.

As of March, the IRS had still not processed more than 12 million tax returns from the previous year. The backlog will impact the ability of the IRS to process this year's tax returns, especially if filed in a paper format.

Mr. Rettig said the difficulty in processing paper returns also bled into the IRS' ability to properly answer phone calls. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the agency was receiving upward of 1,500 calls per second from taxpayers. Most of the calls and voicemail messages were never answered, he said.

"We need to crush our return backlog because the folks who answer the phones also process paper, so when we get through the paper, we can get all those folks full time back on the phones and handling it," Mr. Rettig said.

To help, Mr. Biden is proposing to spend upward of \$389 million in this year's budget to boost the IRS' capacity to answer telephones. By Mr. Rettig's own admission, though, the goal of the added spending would be to ensure the IRS can answer 8 out of every 10 calls.

IRS officials say that the COVID-19 pandemic is to blame for the backlog and poor performance because it prevented the agency from properly staffing up. Even now, the IRS has only been able to hire 2,000 out of the 10,000 additional personnel it has been approved to bring on board.

"The pandemic caused significant hiring challenges, including low applicant pools in some locations, delays in fingerprinting due to closed facilities, and delays in processing applicants virtually," Mr. Rettig said.

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HEADLINE	04/07 UN assembly boots Russia off HRC
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/7/un-gives-russia-boot-human-rights-council-over-ukr/
GIST	<p>The U.N. General Assembly on Thursday booted Russia from the world body's lead human rights agency to protest Moscow's invasion of neighboring Ukraine and the brutal tactics reportedly used against Ukrainian civilians caught up in the fighting.</p> <p>But there were a significant number of abstentions for the vote on the proposal first pushed by the Biden administration.</p> <p>In the end, Russia was suspended from the U.N. Human Rights Council by a vote of 93-24 on Thursday afternoon, with 58 nations abstaining. Russia was in the second year of a three-year term on the 47-member panel.</p> <p>The move came as the U.S. Congress and the European Union moved ahead of further sanctions on Russia's critical energy sector, the Kyiv government appealed again for more Western military aid, and Russia continued to redeploy its forces away from the capital of Kyiv in anticipation of a renewed and reinforced push against Ukrainian forces in the south and east.</p> <p>Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a Senate hearing Thursday the fighting appeared headed for a "long slog" and confirmed the Kremlin had abandoned its initial plans to capture the Ukrainian capital.</p> <p>"There's a significant battle yet ahead down in the southeast, down around the Donbas region where the Russians intend to amass forces and continue their assault," the general told the Senate Armed Services Committee.</p>

As Gen. Milley was testifying, U.S. lawmakers were ratcheting up the pressure on Russia, voting overwhelmingly to suspend trade privileges for Moscow and formally banning the importation of Russian oil. After a number of partisan and procedural hang-ups, both measures passed the evenly divided Senate without a dissenting vote.

President Biden is expected to sign the measures quickly.

Ukrainian officials said Russian forces continued to shell cities around the country, despite the pullback from Kyiv and other northern cities. Regional Gov. Oleh Synehubov said in a video posted Thursday that at least one person had been killed and 14 wounded in shelling on Ukraine's northeastern city of Kharkiv.

Russian defense officials claimed Thursday that missile attacks had destroyed four fuel storage facilities in Mykolayiv, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia and Chuchiv, but the Kremlin's top spokesman also made a rare public admission that the fighting had taken a toll in what President Vladimir Putin has called a "special military operation."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov conceded in an interview with Britain's Sky News, "We have significant losses of troops. And it's a huge tragedy for us."

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and fellow foreign ministers of the Group of Seven nations met in Brussels on Thursday to discuss next steps in the crisis and keep Russia on the defensive over the mounting evidence of atrocities in the six-week war.

"Haunting images of civilian deaths, victims of torture and apparent executions, as well as reports of sexual violence and destruction of civilian infrastructure, show the true face of Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine and its people," the G-7 ministers said in a joint statement.

U.N. rebuke

Sergiy Kyslytsya, Ukraine's ambassador to the U.N., told General Assembly delegates before Thursday's vote that the need to oust Russia from the Geneva-based Human Rights Council was even more pressing following disturbing the reports that emerged in recent days from Bucha, a suburb of Kyiv, and other villages around the country that had been occupied by Russian forces.

"Bucha and dozens of other Ukrainian cities and villages, where thousands of peaceful residents have been killed, tortured, raped, abducted and robbed by the Russian army, serve as an example of how dramatically far the Russian Federation has gone from its initial declaration in the human rights domain," Mr. Kyslytsya said.

News of the atrocities committed in Bucha quickly spread after the release of disturbing photos showing hundreds of civilian bodies — both adults and children — found in the streets and in mass graves after occupying Russian forces pulled back.

Russia became only the second nation ever to be forced off the Council, U.N. officials said. Libya was suspended after a General Assembly vote in 2011 in the chaos following the violent overthrow of dictator Moammar Gadhafi.

Russia has a veto as one of five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, but could not prevent the vote, which required a two-thirds majority to pass. Russia's Deputy Ambassador Gennady Kuzmin blamed the Biden administration for pressing the vote when a number of nations said a formal investigation of war crimes should have been undertaken first.

"What we're seeing today is an attempt by the United States to maintain its dominant position and total control," Mr. Kuzmin said. "We reject the untruthful allegations against us, based on staged events and widely circulated fakes."

The United States' U.N. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said the suspension was necessary because of Russia's "gross and systematic violations of human rights."

"We have collectively sent a clear message that Russia will be held accountable," Ms. Thomas-Greenfield said Thursday in a statement.

Russia has heatedly denied allegations that its troops have committed war crimes, but German intelligence officials said they have proof such atrocities were part of Mr. Putin's strategy since he greenlighted the invasion six weeks ago.

Germany's BND foreign intelligence service said it had intercepted radio traffic from Russian military troops operating in the area near Kyiv where Bucha is located. According to the German magazine Der Spiegel, which broke the story, Russian soldiers can be clearly heard saying they were shooting civilians.

"The material suggests that the [Russian] troops spoke of the atrocities as though they were simply discussing their everyday lives," Der Spiegel reported. "The atrocities perpetrated on civilians in Bucha were neither random acts nor the product of individual soldiers who got out of hand."

While the U.N. debate was playing out in New York, Ukraine's top diplomat was at NATO headquarters in Brussels pressing his country's case for more firepower to use in their fight against Moscow.

Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba told reporters he had only one item on his agenda when meeting with officials from NATO countries: "Weapons, weapons, weapons."

The U.S. and its allies have rushed to supply Ukrainian forces with anti-tank and anti-aircraft weaponry and other supplies, allowing Kyiv to hold off a much larger and better-armed Russian invasion force so far. But there have been clear tensions between NATO and the government of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy over more aggressive measures, such as supplying Kyiv with fighter jets or establishing a no-fly zone over Ukrainian airspace. The U.S. and its allies say they do not want to be dragged into a direct shooting war with a nuclear-armed Russia.

"We are confident that the best way to help Ukraine now is to provide it with all necessary [aid] to contain Putin and to defeat the Russian army in Ukraine," Mr. Kuleba said. "The more weapons we get and the sooner they arrive in Ukraine, the more human lives will be saved."

Ukraine's most pressing needs on the battlefield are jet fighters, anti-ship missiles, armored personnel carriers and heavy air defense systems, Mr. Kuleba told reporters at NATO headquarters. While some countries have balked at sending Ukraine systems that could be considered offensive weapons, Mr. Kuleba said such a term is a distinction without a difference in the middle of a war for survival.

"Every weapon used in the territory of Ukraine, by the Ukrainian army, against a foreign aggressor, is defensive by definition," he said.

Ukrainian and Russian diplomats have held a series of direct talks seeking a halt to the fighting, but the U.N.'s top humanitarian official, who spoke with top officials from both sides Thursday, said he was pessimistic about the chances for an early cease-fire, given the deep differences between the two sides.

"I think it's not going to be easy because the two sides ... have very little trust in each other," U.N. Undersecretary-General Martin Griffiths told The Associated Press. "I'm not optimistic."

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HEADLINE	04/07 Oregon sues Covid test company: fraud
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Oregon-sues-COVID-test-company-millions-of-17065425.php

GIST	<p>SALEM, Ore. (AP) — The state of Oregon accused owners of an Illinois-based COVID-19 testing company of stealing millions of dollars in federal funds and insurance money in a lawsuit filed Thursday and said they boasted about buying a mansion and expensive sports cars.</p> <p>Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum sued the Center for Covid Control, or CCC, and its testing partner, Doctors Clinical Laboratory, for deceptively marketing testing services and for violating Oregon’s Unlawful Trade Practices Act.</p> <p>The lawsuit says Aleya Siyaj and Akbar Ali Syed, the married couple who own CCC, had no prior experience in the medical field or medical testing and had run an axe throwing lounge and a photography studio.</p> <p>This raises questions about how they managed to become the recipients of federal funds for testing. The lawsuit noted they’re also being investigated by the FBI and Illinois public health authorities. FBI agents searched the company’s headquarters near Chicago in January, according to local news reports.</p> <p>Washington state Attorney General Bob Ferguson sued the CCC in January, accusing it of improperly handling tests and providing fake results.</p> <p>The CCC did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment. A phone number listed on its website was disconnected. The website said CCC has paused its operations “and will not resume collection of patient samples until staffing resources permit CCC to operate at full capacity.”</p> <p>Oregon’s lawsuit alleges CCC and Doctors Clinical Laboratory falsely told consumers they could provide accurate PCR COVID-19 results within 72 hours, but instead produced questionable test results and lacked proper capacity to store and process the thousands of test specimens they received each day.</p> <p>“These companies were ill-equipped to scale up as fast as they did,” Rosenblum said in a statement. The lawsuit says CCC grew from one testing site in Illinois — in the former axe throwing lounge — to become one of the largest testing center operators in America, with 300 test sites across the United States, including five in Oregon.</p> <p>“Oregonians made crucial decisions — about returning to work or school, travel, and visiting family and friends — in reliance on shoddy tests,” she said.</p> <p>The 29-page lawsuit alleges the couple funneled millions of dollars received from the federal government and insurance companies for testing to themselves.</p> <p>“Syed posted pictures of the couple’s purchases on social media, including a \$1,360,000 mansion and multiple luxury cars worth millions, including a sky blue Lamborghini, a red Lamborghini Countach, a Tesla Model Y, and a Ferrari Enzo,” the lawsuit said.</p> <p>Syed bought that Ferrari, a rare model, for \$3.7 million, according to the lawsuit.</p> <p>The lawsuit, filed in Multnomah County, asks that CCC and DCL be banned permanently from offering COVID-19 testing in Oregon, for restitution for Oregonians who were victimized and for civil penalties of up to \$25,000 for each violation of Oregon law, plus attorney fees and costs of Oregon’s investigation.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Affordability squeeze Seattle homebuyers
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/real-estate/rising-mortgage-rates-add-to-affordability-squeeze-for-seattle-area-homebuyers/
GIST	It’s no longer just sky-high prices and slim inventory squeezing Seattle-area home buyers. Add to the list: rising interest rates.

After hitting rock-bottom lows earlier in the pandemic, mortgage rates have been steadily ticking up this year amid concerns about inflation. Since the start of the year, the average rate for a 30-year mortgage has climbed from 3.22% to 4.72%, the biggest three-month jump since 1994, according to Freddie Mac.

Rising rates could finally begin to temper the runaway housing market after scores of buyers looked to take advantage of low rates or relocate during the past two years. Nationally, home prices climbed nearly 19% last year, and 14% in King County. Many economists expect that rate of growth to slow this year.

But for those still trying to buy into pricey markets like Seattle — particularly buyers with less to spend — rising interest rates are introducing yet another challenge.

For every 1% interest rate increase, home shoppers can afford about 10% less for a home, said Jim Murphy, with Caliber Home Loans in Kirkland.

With rates changing quickly, “you’re talking about purchasing a house for more than you anticipated a short time ago,” Murphy said. “If you haven’t talked to your lender since November, you need to.”

As Zachary St. John and his girlfriend looked for a home in Thurston and Pierce counties this spring, higher interest rates made an already tough search even more difficult.

The combination of bidding wars and higher interest rates led the couple to stretch their maximum budget beyond their initial \$425,000 and start planning to rent out a room in their new home to a roommate or Airbnb guest to help cover their monthly cost.

“We just can’t be that competitive,” said St. John, who works for a nonprofit and whose girlfriend is in school to become an elementary school teacher. “The houses we’re looking at are the cheapest inhabitable houses in Western Washington.”

The median single-family home price in King County last month was \$930,000, up 8.4% from a month earlier and 12.7% from last year, according to data released Thursday by the Northwest Multiple Listing Service.

The median home price was \$557,000 in Pierce County, \$505,000 in Thurston, \$800,000 in Snohomish and \$538,500 in Kitsap.

“It’s a double whammy,” said June Lu, branch manager at a Movement Mortgage branch in Renton. “Prices keep escalating, but their buying power every month they’re seeing reduced by \$50,000 to \$100,000.”

The uptick comes as first-time buyers face another rising cost: rent.

After dropping in some areas early in the pandemic, rents have rebounded across the Seattle area. In King County, median rent for new leases is up 19% compared to the same time in 2021, according to Apartment List. Rents are up 11% compared to the same time in 2019, before the pandemic.

Home shoppers facing both rent hikes and rising interest rates are “in panic mode,” Lu said.

To deal with rising costs, brokers and lenders say some buyers are looking to areas farther from Seattle, teaming up with family members to buy, or tapping into loans or gifts from parents, though not everyone has access to that type of help.

Trisha Marques and her husband have been searching for their first home in Seattle after the couple and their young children moved to the area in late 2020 to be closer to family. They hope to stay in Magnolia, where they’ve been renting, but recently had to drop their budget from \$1.3 million to \$1.2 million because of rising interest rates.

Marques, who works in marketing and whose husband works at an ad agency, said the couple has expanded their search to other neighborhoods, including Ballard and Fremont, and talked about buying a home that's "a little older and needs a little more work to be able to get in here."

"We've had all sorts of conversations, not even can we afford it in Magnolia, but can we afford it in Seattle? It's tough," Marques said.

The market still feels competitive for many buyers, but there are signs of cooling.

Nationally, a larger share of home sellers are dropping their prices, according to Redfin. The company's chief economist, Daryl Fairweather, said in a statement, "sellers can no longer overprice their home and still expect buyers to clamor at their door. That's because higher mortgage rates are eating into homebuyers' budgets."

In some areas of the Puget Sound region, home shoppers are buying fewer homes than at this time last year. Pending sales throughout King County were down 11.5% in March from the same time last year, according to the listing service. Pending sales were down 8.6% in Pierce County, roughly flat in Snohomish and up 8.7% in Kitsap.

Still, inventory is tight. More new homes were listed for sale last month than in February, a sign of the usual spring uptick. Even so, according to a measure known as months of inventory, it would take less than two weeks to sell all the homes for sale in King, Pierce and Snohomish counties at current demand. The listing service once considered four to six months of inventory a "balanced" market.

"Some buyers are getting scared or turned off by increasing interest rates, but then I also have buyers who think interest rates are only going to continue to increase, so it's also putting pressure to buy a house even quicker," Bellevue-based Windermere agent Taylor Brazen Tagge said.

For one pair of Brazen Tagge's clients, the rise in rates between late last year and March dropped the price of the home they could afford from \$940,000 to \$800,000 in order to maintain the same monthly payment. "We've had to widen our search even more," she said.

St. John finally found a break this past weekend, when he and his girlfriend secured a two-bedroom 1940s home in Olympia near the state Capitol campus for \$435,000. After paying to get a lower interest rate, known as "buying down" the rate, the couple landed at a 4.63% rate, St. John said.

The house will need some work, but "we went all in for what we had," he said.

"I really feel like if we don't get a house in this interest rate bump, or the next one or two, it's going to be unattainable for us."

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HEADLINE	04/07 Sound Transit to change fare enforcement
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/sound-transit-moves-toward-lighter-touch-on-fare-enforcement/
GIST	<p>Sound Transit moved a step closer toward a lighter touch around fare enforcement Thursday, the culmination of years of introspection by the agency in light of data showing that previous policies landed hardest on people of color and low-income riders.</p> <p>Under the new policies, which were advanced through committee and will be taken up by the full board later this month, riders would receive more warnings, and fines for not paying fares would escalate more slowly than before. The agency would retain the right to send those who haven't paid to collections and district court, a step some transit advocates continue to oppose. But Sound Transit would graduate to that action more slowly, offering other means of resolving nonpayment along the way.</p>

Riders who are behind on payment also would no longer face suspension from the system, and law enforcement would be removed from the act of fare collection altogether.

The changes are meant to balance board members' concerns about inequitable enforcement with their growing worry about declining fare revenue. Some board members said the new policies could go too easy on those who don't pay, while transit advocates and other board members raised concerns that the new policies don't do enough to reduce what they view as overly punitive measures.

Committee members also voted to lower the agency's reduced fare rate from \$1.50 to \$1, although two board members raised concerns about the utility of such a move. Sound Transit's goal is to enroll 80% of eligible riders into the ORCA LIFT program for lower-income users. Currently, less than 40% of that group is estimated to be enrolled.

They also moved forward an extension of Sound Transit's new "fare ambassador" program, intended to reduce police and security's role in enforcement.

The votes Thursday, spaced out over two committee meetings, came 2½ years after the transit agency launched an examination of its fare enforcement policies.

"We really need to focus, and this is going to be long-term work, on fixing the inequalities and where the injustices in the system are without gutting the system," board member and Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers said in the meeting Thursday.

The discussion over a new approach to fares began in 2019, before the pandemic or 2020 protests following George Floyd's murder by a Minneapolis police officer. But both events further elevated the stakes of the board's work.

Amid data showing Black riders received 22% of all fare citations despite comprising just 9% of ridership, Sound Transit began the fare ambassador program in summer 2021, removing security contractors from passenger interactions. But the program has struggled with staffing levels and has shown limited evidence of its effectiveness.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, ridership on Sound Transit's light-rail system, buses and trains has plummeted. In January 2022, Sound Transit logged around 80,000 daily riders — almost half of January 2020's 157,000 daily users. After collecting nearly \$100 million in fares in 2019, the agency recouped just \$36 million in 2020. In 2021, the agency's financial plan assumed fares would be roughly 6% of its total budget, or \$8.3 billion, between 2017 and 2046. The pandemic has thrown that assumption into doubt; staff said Thursday that revenue could dip to \$6 billion in that same period.

CEO Peter Rogoff, who is due to depart the agency this spring, has also expressed concern that fewer people are tapping their ORCA cards before boarding. Some members felt these new policies would exacerbate the problem.

"I think it's a little soft, in my mind," said board member and Pierce County Executive Bruce Dammeier.

Under the recommended policies, riders who did not pay would receive two warnings before being penalized for nonpayment, instead of one. The third warning would come with a \$50 administrative fine, followed by a \$75 fine for the fourth, as opposed to the \$124 civil infractions currently meted out. Riders may be referred to collections if they do not either pay the fine or resolve the situation another way, such as signing up for a reduced-fare card.

Each additional interaction could come with a \$124 civil infraction referred to district court.

One major unanswered question is how Sound Transit will keep track of warnings. Agency data showed 76% of riders did not show identification when approached by a fare ambassador, which board member and King County Councilmember Dave Upthegrove called a potentially "fatal flaw."

	<p>Rogoff agreed it was a “really vexing issue.”</p> <p>Katie Wilson, general secretary of the Transit Riders Union, said the policies would be an improvement. But she raised concerns that they could still send riders into the legal system.</p> <p>“If someone can’t pay, they’re not going to pay, and then all they’re doing is ruining their credit history and ability to get an apartment,” she said. “I don’t think that those consequences are effective in getting people to pay their fare. All you’re doing is harming poor people.”</p> <p>Board member and King County Councilmember Joe McDermott said Thursday he would introduce two amendments before the full board later this month to eliminate referrals to the court system and Sound Transit’s ability to send riders’ debt to collections.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 King Co. identifies 3 finalists for new sheriff
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/king-county-names-3-finalists-for-new-sheriff-including-interim-sheriff/
GIST	<p>King County Executive Dow Constantine announced three candidates Thursday to be the county’s next top law enforcement officer, choosing the county’s interim sheriff, as well as two police officers from Southern police departments.</p> <p>The three finalists are King County interim Sheriff Patti Cole-Tindall; Charles Kimble, chief of police in Killeen, Texas; and Reginald Moorman, a major in the Atlanta Police Department.</p> <p>The county’s nationwide search, launched last fall, yielded 12 applicants for the sheriff position, Constantine’s office said. Of those 12, seven completed a round of interviews.</p> <p>“Using priorities and criteria set by the Public Safety Advisory Committee, I am pleased we have identified three highly qualified finalists to be the next King County Sheriff,” Constantine said in a prepared statement. “Before I appoint the next Sheriff, I am eager to hear from the public and our KCSO employees as they meet the candidates and hear their vision for delivering high quality, professional, and equitable public safety.”</p> <p>When Constantine named Cole-Tindall the interim sheriff last fall, both said she would not be a candidate for the permanent position.</p> <p>“If I was part of the application process, I feel it would distract from the work that I think needs to be done,” Cole-Tindall said in November.</p> <p>Constantine’s office said at the time that Cole-Tindall would serve through the recruitment process “at which time a new Sheriff will be appointed.”</p> <p>On Thursday, Constantine’s office directed questions to Cole-Tindall and said all three candidates would speak with the media next week.</p> <p>“Sheriff Cole-Tindall informed the Executive of her changed plans prior to submitting her application and he welcomed her doing so,” Chase Gallagher, a Constantine spokesperson, wrote in an email.</p> <p>Cole-Tindall, through a spokesperson, did not respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>The finalists will go through further interviews with members of the county’s Public Safety Advisory Committee, county employees, labor representatives and officials from the cities that contract with the Sheriff’s Office. Those meetings will be closed to the public.</p>

There will also be at least two public forums, held virtually. The first will be April 18 at 6 p.m., and the second April 21 at 9 a.m.

Constantine hopes to make a choice in early May, which must be approved by the Metropolitan King County Council.

The county started the search last fall for its lead law enforcement officer after Constantine made clear that he would not be extending the term of then-Sheriff Mitzi Johanknecht.

Cole-Tindall, 57, of Kent, has been interim sheriff since Jan. 1, after a long career in public service. Before assuming the top job, she served as undersheriff, the department's No. 2, for a year and a half, and served as the department's chief of technical services for almost five years.

She is the first person of color to serve as sheriff in Washington's largest county.

She began her career in law enforcement in 1991 as a special agent with the Washington State Gambling Commission, a position for which she carried a gun and completed the state's basic law enforcement academy. She moved to the state Employment Security Department, where she worked on investigations into fraud and theft of unemployment benefits.

She moved to King County government in 1998, working as an investigator in the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention. She was later an assistant director in the department's Community Corrections Division.

Constantine tabbed her in 2010 as the county's director of Labor Relations, responsible for representing the county in collective bargaining. She was interim director of the county's Office of Law Enforcement Oversight in 2014. She returned to law enforcement, joining the Sheriff's Office in 2015.

Kimble, 52, has been police chief in Killeen, a city of about 145,000 people, since 2017 and has 30 years of law enforcement experience. A Milwaukee native and U.S. Army veteran, he began his law enforcement career with the Milwaukee Police Department, where he was an officer from 1992 to 1995.

In 1995, he moved to the Fayetteville, North Carolina, Police Department, where he first served as a school resource officer, before going on to a variety of positions. He was named assistant chief of the department in 2009. In 2014, he was named police chief and assistant vice chancellor at Fayetteville State University.

Two years later he became police chief in Spring Lake, North Carolina, before moving to Killeen a year later.

Moorman, 43, has been with the Atlanta Police Department most of his career. An Atlanta native, he began with the department in 2001, walking a foot beat. He became a sergeant in 2007 and a lieutenant in 2011.

In 2013, he was named deputy director of a High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Task Force — a joint local, state and federal group — focused on Georgia and the Carolinas. He was named captain in 2015 and major in 2020.

He has previously been the senior Atlanta police officer at Mercedes-Benz Stadium, home of the Atlanta Falcons, and is currently the section commander at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. He is an adjunct professor of criminal justice at Georgia State University, Atlanta Metropolitan State College and American Intercontinental University.

King County voters in 2020 voted to make sheriff an appointed, rather than elected, position for the first time in more than a quarter century. When Johanknecht's term ended in January, Constantine named her deputy, Cole-Tindall, interim sheriff.

	Part of the rationale for switching sheriff to an appointed position was that it would allow the county to conduct a much broader search. When it was an elected position, candidates were limited to those living in the area and, in practice, to those already working in the Sheriff's Office.
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HEADLINE	04/07 Federal employees vax mandate upheld
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/appeals-court-oks-biden-federal-employee-vaccine-mandate/
GIST	<p>NEW ORLEANS (AP) — President Joe Biden's requirement that all federal employees be vaccinated against COVID-19 was upheld Thursday by a federal appeals court.</p> <p>In a 2-1 ruling, a panel of the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals reversed a lower court and ordered dismissal of a lawsuit challenging the mandate. The ruling, a rare win for the administration at the New Orleans-based appellate court, said that the federal judge didn't have jurisdiction in the case and those challenging the requirement could have pursued administrative remedies under Civil Service law.</p> <p>Biden issued an executive order Sept. 9 ordering vaccinations for all executive branch agency employees, with exceptions for medical and religious reasons. U.S. District Judge Jeffrey Brown, who was appointed to the District Court for the Southern District of Texas by then-President Donald Trump, issued a nationwide injunction against the requirement in January.</p> <p>When the case was argued at the 5th Circuit last month, administration lawyers had noted that district judges in a dozen jurisdictions had rejected a challenge to the vaccine requirement for federal workers before Brown ruled.</p> <p>The administration argued that the Constitution gives the president, as the head of the federal workforce, the same authority as the CEO of a private corporation to require that employees be vaccinated.</p> <p>Lawyers for those challenging the mandate had pointed to a recent Supreme Court opinion that the government cannot force private employers to require employee vaccinations.</p> <p>Twelve of 17 active judges at the 5th Circuit were nominated to the court by Republicans, including six Trump appointees.</p> <p>Judges Carl Stewart and James Dennis, both nominated to the court by President Bill Clinton, were in the majority. Judge Rhesa Barksdale, a senior judge nominated by President George H.W. Bush, dissented, saying the relief the challengers sought does not fall under the Civil Service Reform Act cited by the administration.</p> <p>The case marked ideological divides at the appeals court even before Thursday's ruling.</p> <p>A different panel had refused in February to block Brown's ruling pending the appeal. That panel's vote was 2-1. There were no reasons given by the majority — Judge Jerry Smith, a President Ronald Reagan nominee, and Don Willett, a Trump nominee.</p> <p>But there was a lengthy dissent by Judge Stephen Higginson, a nominee of President Barack Obama, who said a single district judge "lacking public health expertise and made unaccountable through life tenure," should not be able to block the president from ordering the same type of COVID-19 safety measures many private sector CEOs have ordered.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 WHO: 65% in Africa infected by Covid
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/up-to-65-of-africans-have-had-covid-far-more-than-thought/

GIST	<p>JOHANNESBURG — The World Health Organization said that up to 65% of people in Africa have been infected with the coronavirus and estimates the number of actual cases may have been nearly 100 times more than those reported.</p> <p>In a new analysis released Thursday, the U.N. health agency reviewed 151 studies of COVID-19 in Africa based on blood samples taken from people on the continent between January 2020 and December 2021. WHO said that by last September, about 65% of people tested had some exposure to COVID-19, translating into about 800 million infections. In contrast, only about 8 million cases had been officially reported to WHO during that time period.</p> <p>“This undercounting is occurring worldwide and it’s no surprise that the numbers are particularly large in Africa where there are so many cases with no symptoms,” WHO’s Africa director Matshidiso Moeti said in a statement. WHO’s analysis found that a large proportion of people with COVID-19 — 67% — showed no symptoms when infected with the disease, a higher percentage than other world regions.</p> <p>Despite repeated warnings from WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus that the coronavirus would devastate Africa, the continent has been among the least affected by the pandemic. In its new analysis, WHO said the milder COVID-19 cases seen in Africa were attributable in part to the continent’s much smaller proportion of people with underlying risk factors like high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease.</p> <p>“Africa’s youthful population is also a protective factor,” the U.N. health agency said. Some studies have also suggested that previous infection with diseases including malaria, may offer people some protection against the coronavirus, although those hypotheses have yet to be confirmed.</p> <p>To date, Africa has reported 11.5 million COVID-19 cases including more than 250,000 deaths. WHO said the virus has been trending downwards since January, although there have been some variations in some countries and some, including South Africa, have been hit particularly hard during successive waves of disease. Last week, WHO said the number of COVID deaths fell by about 30% on the continent.</p> <p>“Despite Africa’s declining infections and high exposure to the virus, we cannot declare victory yet against COVID-19,” said WHO Africa chief Moeti.</p> <p>“The risks of more lethal variants emerging which overwhelm immunity gained from past infections cannot be brushed aside,” she said, calling for increased vaccination rates across the continent. To date, only about 15% of people in Africa have been immunized against COVID-19.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Fire burns downtown Friday Harbor
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/ferry-crew-atf-called-to-assist-as-fire-burns-in-friday-harbor/
GIST	<p>Three mainstays of Friday Harbor’s downtown commercial district burned Thursday in what officials say was a distressing blow to the San Juan Island town as it prepares to welcome tourists back after a difficult two years of pandemic restrictions.</p> <p>“It’s absolutely devastating,” said Kimberley Kimple, a spokesperson with Orcas Island Fire & Rescue.</p> <p>The fire, at the corner of First and Spring streets, engulfed Herb’s Tavern, Crystal Seas Kayaking and the Crows Nest Coffee Shoppe. It was reported at 3:43 a.m. by a passing tow truck driver, Kimple said.</p> <p>By 2 p.m., two buildings had been demolished to prevent the spread of flames and the fire had been completely contained, though hot spots were still being monitored, Kimple said.</p> <p>No one was in the buildings and no injuries were reported, she said.</p> <p>Multiple fire agencies from neighboring islands, including Lopez and Orcas, responded.</p>

	<p>In addition, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' Seattle office sent special agents, including a certified fire investigator, to assist in determining the origin and cause of the blaze.</p> <p>The fire delayed at least one run of the ferry Tillikum after crews were asked to help, the ferry system said.</p> <p>The 6:10 a.m. sailing from Friday Harbor to Shaw and Orcas islands was delayed 35 minutes after the San Juan County Fire Department asked for help from the crews.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Spokane hospital study long Covid patients
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/spokane-hospital-to-accept-long-covid-patients-for-national-study-the-first-east-of-the-cascades/
GIST	<p>Patients across the Inland Northwest suffering from long COVID-19 have an opportunity to be a part of the science and research seeking to find treatments and answers.</p> <p>Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center is one of a handful of sites at Pacific Northwest hospitals researching long COVID as a part of an initiative from the National Institutes of Health.</p> <p>Institute for Systems Biology, a Seattle-based organization, received the federal contract for the study in the Pacific Northwest and is partnering with Providence hospitals throughout Washington and California to follow, test and potentially treat long COVID patients.</p> <p>The study is part of a research initiative called RECOVER, which will require about 1,000 participants in the Pacific Northwest who are 18 and older and are willing to be a part of a four-year study.</p> <p>COVID-19 can have debilitating and devastating long-term consequences, from heart, lung and kidney damage to chronic fatigue, brain fog and other symptoms.</p> <p>Some people have lost their sense of smell entirely; others can no longer work due to constant fatigue or brain fog brought on by the virus.</p> <p>Long COVID patients in Eastern Washington have had to rely on their primary care providers for care due to a lack of specialty clinics east of the Cascades.</p> <p>Now, their experiences can be shared with researchers in Spokane.</p> <p>The RECOVER study has been designed with patients in mind, said Dr. Katherine Tuttle, a nephrologist and director of research at Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center.</p> <p>Tuttle was part of the team that helped design the study, and she said the correct controls will be important to understanding which symptoms can be linked to a person's COVID infection.</p> <p>Also important, she said, is putting long COVID patients and their experience at the center of the study.</p> <p>"Patients are the experts in their disease, and they should not be passive advisers," Tuttle said. "They should be partners in the research and help us answer the questions."</p> <p>After more than two years of the pandemic, long COVID is finally being discussed at the national level.</p> <p>President Joe Biden released a memo this week directing federal health agencies to prioritize planning and reporting on long COVID in the country. Tuttle said she hopes this means there will be a substantial increase in support for developing more long COVID clinics.</p> <p>Dr. Jim Heath, president of the Institute for Systems Biology and the director of the consortium, said the study is enrolling patients who recently had COVID along with those who continue to exhibit COVID</p>

symptoms long after their initial diagnosis, and patients who tested positive but might not have those symptoms. The study will also seek to enroll some people who have not tested positive for the virus as controls.

Patients in the study will participate for four years, and initial enrollment will place patients in different tiers, based on the severity of symptoms and side effects. In Spokane, patients enrolled through Sacred Heart will likely be contacted about every three months, Tuttle said. Some visits can be done remotely while other visits may require blood draws, physical evaluations and additional scans.

Through wide-scale observation and the large amount of patients enrolled in the study, researchers hope to sort out what conditions might predict whether a person gets long COVID as well as which symptoms are most commonly linked to the virus.

Heath said the goal is to go beyond that, however, to understand what mechanisms are at play and hopefully test and develop treatments to help suffering patients.

“The hope is we’ll also get mechanistic information about why these conditions are appearing and how to reverse them,” he said.

While there are no drugs or treatments being tested through the consortium, Heath said the expectation is that there will be eventually.

The Sacred Heart site will take anyone who is eligible, regardless of whether they are a Providence patient. Tuttle said patients from North Idaho, Montana, Eastern Washington and Oregon can participate as well.

Tuttle, whose specialty is kidney medicine, knows firsthand how COVID affected kidney function. She remembers the team using the last dialysis machine at Sacred Heart in the midst of a particularly bad COVID wave to keep a patient’s kidneys functioning while they were being ventilated.

She warned that the impacts of long COVID might not be obvious to everyone, and some organs failing are potentially “silent killers” in the background if they are not detected early.

“If somebody has had COVID, and they’re not feeling right, I would recommend that they see their primary care provider and have a physical and some lab work done,” Tuttle said. “Kidney failure doesn’t make you feel bad until you’re nearly dead.”

Long COVID can impact anyone who tested positive for the virus, including those who had relatively mild symptoms, Tuttle said.

“People who think they had a cold or even had COVID twice and it was no big deal, they could still get long COVID,” she said.

To see if you are eligible for the RECOVER consortium study, visit isbscience.org/pnwrecover. If you are eligible, you can fill out the survey to indicate your interest in participating.

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HEADLINE	04/07 Alaska Airlines plan: reduce flights 2%
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/alaska-airlines-reduce-flights-by-2-improve-service-after-cancellations-pilot-shortage/TSA3DWXVFAIFMJRD4EMHR3WYA/
GIST	<p>After numerous cancellations and to get back on track, Alaska Airlines is planning to reduce its total number of flights by 2% through the end of June, according to a news release on Thursday.</p> <p>Tens of thousands of passengers who booked flights on the airline recently found themselves stranded, including at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, as flights were canceled due to a pilot shortage.</p>

On Thursday, the airline admitted it had a shortage of pilots and had canceled 42 flights out of Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

On Monday, 30 additional flights were canceled at the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

At least 10 more flights scheduled for Tuesday had also been canceled.

The cancellations started the same day as members of the Alaska Airlines Pilots Union held an informational picket for a new contract following two years of failed negotiations.

Alaska Airlines released a statement about two hours ago, which said it was deeply sorry to its loyal customers after canceling “an unusual number of flights.”

The airline also said in part, “We put you in a frustrating situation-most likely when you were looking to take a fun trip, family vacation or needed to get somewhere important to you. We must do better. Over the last few days, we looked at how we got here, and are taking action to get back on track. We’re committed to being the airline you love.”

To improve its performance the airline said it will reduce its flights by about 2% through the end of June, matching its current pilot capacity.

Those reductions will reportedly show up as cancellations, and the airline plans to post its schedule in mid-April.

“We will do everything we can to minimize disruptions to your plans and we will let you know in advance if your itinerary is impacted by these schedule adjustments,” airline officials stated.

In an additional effort to improve its performance, the airline said it will graduate more than 30 new pilots this month and more in May.

During the pandemic, more than 10,000 pilots had left the airline industry.

The airline had launched a new academy to bring in new pilots, but the airline said a backlog in its training program had built up, and trainings were canceled and delayed due to student and trainer illnesses. This prevented trainings from being rescheduled quickly enough.

With those training delays, the airline said it was short 63 pilots for April.

Pilots with Alaska Airlines are still working to secure an agreement on a long-term contract.

As for those who have booked with Alaska Airlines, it has set up a dedicated phone line for people who have questions about cancellations.

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HEADLINE	04/07 King Co. faces new rise in Covid cases
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/covid-19-cases-rise-king-county-recent-weeks/FK5GZ6BDINFQTLYHBYND3XXJ5U/
GIST	<p>KING COUNTY, Wash. — Although COVID-19 cases have decreased in King County since January, in which health officials were seeing an average of 6,500 new daily cases, in the last two weeks the number of new cases has been increasing, according to Public Health - Seattle & King County.</p> <p>Health officials said they have seen a 91% increase in new cases, from an average of 186 daily during the week of March 21 to a current average of 356.</p>

However, the rate of those being hospitalized has remained steady, with two to four hospitalizations occurring daily since mid-March, according to officials. Since early February, deaths have been falling.

“Because we’re starting at a relatively low baseline number of cases, hospitalizations and deaths currently, small increases lead to percentage increases that appear large compared to the actual size of the increase,” officials said ([check out this webpage for more info on this effect](#)).

Although there has been an increase in cases, King County Health Officer Dr. Jeff Duchin said it is too soon to make any clear-cut statements about the recent rise in cases.

“With what we’re seeing now, it’s not possible to accurately predict the timing or severity of potential future surges,” Duchin said.

He estimates a rise in cases could last for several weeks, but there is no expectation that the current increase in cases or hospitalizations and deaths will be as severe as the omicron surge that happened during the winter.

Duchin said for those who have been vaccinated and boosted, the risk of acquiring the virus in the county and developing a serious infection is “greatly reduced” compared to the peak that happened in January. As for what is causing the rise in cases, Duchin said various factors affect the transmission of the virus, which interact in “complex ways.”

With the [BA.2 variant of COVID-19 being the dominant strain in the state and the county](#), factors likely include the spread of that variant, along with the loosening of the mask mandates and changes in people’s behavior.

The recent cases that have been reported in King County have been caused by the BA.2 variant.

“As of the week of March 20, 78% of King County COVID-19 cases sequenced by the University of Washington were the BA.2 omicron variant,” said Duchin.

While BA.2 is “highly contagious” and spreads faster than the earlier omicron variant, the vaccines are said to protect well against the variant, notably for those who are vaccinated and boosted.

“But it’s important to understand that the booster dose is needed for full protection against hospitalization and death,” Duchin said.

Duchin also said, “People should be aware of the increasing trend in cases and take precautions. When cases are increasing, all COVID-19 prevention measures become more useful.”

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HEADLINE	04/07 Riders return mass transit; safety concerns
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/riders-return-to-mass-transit-in-seattle-but-some-raise-safety-concerns
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — As people return to downtown Seattle for work and begin traveling again, more people are taking King County Metro buses and Link light rail.</p> <p>Recent incidents like the attack near the Pioneer Square light rail station have concerned some riders.</p> <p>KOMO News checked in with riders in person and on social media and asked them what they thought about taking mass transit nowadays.</p> <p>KOMO News heard from dozens of people online. And, we talked Thursday to a dozen or so Link light rail riders at the Westlake Station.</p>

Many people said it's safe and they have not had any issues whatsoever. But some people said they are not going to take light rail or the bus as much anymore.

When it comes to King County Metro bus and Link light rail-- a lot of riders said, "no major safety concerns" and "no major issues."

But some people have had some scary encounters.

Alicia Wright was taking Link light rail to downtown from the airport March 12.

She ended up texting Sound Transit security for help.

"A homeless man got on Tukwila station I believe," Wright said. "He was immediately agitated and not on there for any good reason. He had a box cutter and he immediately started cutting into plexi glass. Sound Transit does have a number to text if you feel unsafe so I did. And they did respond to me very quickly. But, the response was, we have an officer standing by at Beacon Hill, which was 25 minutes away from where we were. So, 25 minutes with a man with a sharp object, who is clearly agitated just isn't ideal."

She offers some good advice for anyone taking Link light rail. Pay attention to the signage on rail cars and in stations. Take note of the emergency number and where to find your car number—which is at the front and back of the car.

In response to safety concerns on mass transit, Sound Transit released this statement Thursday:

"The safety of our passengers is our top priority, and we have multiple layers of security in place for our riders."

Sound Transit said it has King County Sheriff's deputies on duty. There are extra private security officers present. And, there are fare ambassadors that "provide additional eyes and ears in the system to report the issues they see."

Sound Transit said passengers should call or text security if they see issues.

Sound Transit said it has about 1.5 million boardings last month.

Last month, they got about 70 complaints from customers about conditions of trains and safety issues. They said the number is slightly up compared to last year.

According to Sound Transit, there have been 27 physical passenger assaults on Link light rail trains so far this year. Last year, there were 84 total.

On social media @RidingRapidDLine posted:

"Fights, threats, open drug use. It seems to be getting better in the past few weeks. But the bus is worst than light rail."

King County Metro issued this response.

Since last summer, in response to increased concerns onboard coaches, Metro increased its security personnel deployment, specifically focusing on routes with higher reports of incidents. The safety of our riders is our top priority.

King County Metro said it's hiring 50 more transit security officers for 24/7 coverage and support. We asked about the number of complaints filed.

	<p>Metro said there were 35 passenger physical altercations in January. That number is down from 40 in January 2021.</p> <p>The number of boardings in January this year was 4.2 million, up from 3.2 million last January.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 DOH: slight jump in rate of new cases
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/coronavirus/some-still-hesitant-about-dropping-covid-safety-protocols
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Family time was in fully swing at Golden Gardens and despite being outdoors, Kevin and Christina Canini still feel it isn't time to put the pandemic safety protocols behind.</p> <p>"I'm a physician and so I take it really seriously," Kevin Canini said "You should wear masks around other people, especially when we're at playgrounds and around other children, especially children of our kids' age aren't vaccinated yet."</p> <p>Sean Thomas is ready to get back to way things were pre-pandemic.</p> <p>"Now I'm pretty much operating almost as normal and don't have to think nearly as much as I used to about provision for things, wondering if things are closed," he said.</p> <p>Doctors KOMO News spoke to said while it's safer outdoors some are still recommending that masks be worn in crowded indoor settings.</p> <p>The latest data from the state's health department indicates that throughout the second half of last month there was a slight jump in COVID case numbers per 100,000.</p> <p>What we're seeing is a combination of the spread of the BA 2 variant, which we know is about 30 more infections than the BA 1 variant," said Dr. Francis Riedo, who works at EvergreenHealth. "We're also seeing the result of people going out (and) mingling."</p> <p>Another study that shows a possible jump in case number is waste water testing, which is when sewage samples are collected to detect COVID-19.</p> <p>Data from four out of six plants in King and Snohomish counties show an increase of at least 100 percent of the virus.</p> <p>Just from the Brightwater plant alone, there's nearly a 500 percent jump.</p> <p>Doctors say it's a sign going forward we can still expect to see changes</p> <p>"I think the wastewater study to me suggest you know, it's not wise to assume any current state we have is going to be a steady state," Liao said. "This is how it's going to be forever. I think we have to be mindful of that."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 SEA near 85% travel volume pre-pandemic
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/spring-break-travelers-fill-the-parking-lots-at-sea-tac-international-airport
GIST	<p>SEATAC, Wash. — It's time to travel again.</p> <p>Spring break travelers are filling up Sea-Tac International Airport to nearly 85 percent of the travel volumes the airport recorded in 2019. The airport says more than 140,000 passengers will be passing through each of the busiest travel days this week.</p> <p>Masks were not being worn in 2019, and more people hailed taxis or ride shares than they do today.</p>

"We had a friend drive us," said Sabrina Tinius, who was headed to security with her husband and two kids en route to their flight to Cabo San Lucas. "Uber is still tricky these days. It doesn't pick up as conveniently."

Looking at the airport drive and departures drop off areas, even before 5 a.m. on Thursday, a lot of travelers chose that same option for getting to the airport. The airport warns that the combination of so many travelers with a shortage of shuttle drivers makes [parking at the airport](#) more difficult than usual, and it is expected to be this way through April.

Tinius said that's the experience they had.

"Yeah, we were too late to reserve the parking this time," Tinius said. "It was all full."

So, what's the best way to get to the airport?

Matt Drause uses light rail.

"Every chance I get because it's just so convenient," Drause said. "You don't have to worry about parking. It's so convenient, it drops you off right here, easy to get on, it's predictable, timely."

So, you find a way to the airport, now it's time to navigate your way to the gate. Sea-Tac officials suggest you arrive two hours before your flight. That will give you plenty of time to get through security, and they're working to make that easier, with their [Spot Saver](#) campaign.

Once checked in, you can make a reservation for the time you want to get through that TSA line. Simply go online, at home or at the airport, and make a reservation. That gets you a code that you flash at the end of the security line, to be taken to the beginning of it. There are only so many reservations made per hour, so keep that in mind if you wait until arriving at the airport to try and get one of those saved spots. That reservation may save you the time you need to grab some food before your flight.

The airport is also offering travelers the chance to [order their food](#) and get it delivered to their gate.

These small tips can help people navigate this surge in travel expected to continue well into the summer months. The Alaska cruise season starts April 11 and Sea-Tac officials say, by the end of 2022, they predict travel to come within 6 percent of the pre-pandemic levels they had in 2019.

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HEADLINE	04/07 King Co. inappropriate rent assist payments
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/king-county-acknowledges-millions-of-dollars-spent-on-inappropriate-rental-assistant-payments
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - When the COVID-19 pandemic initially hit in March 2020, King County shelled out \$350 million in rental assistance to tenants and landlords.</p> <p>In order to make the process of distributing funds easier, the county inadvertently spent millions on funds that are being investigated as "inappropriate" payments.</p> <p>Applicants had to fill out a one-page declaration that included a checkbox for applicants to affirm that they would lose their housing if they did not get rental assistance.</p> <p>Then all they had to do was fill out a name, number of people in the household, and income total and a signature.</p> <p>The form says King County 'may' verify the income and repayment would be required if the information is falsified. There is also a signature line for a caseworker to make the form complete.</p>

Nearly 35,000 people filled out the form and got some financial assistance, according to Leo Flor, the Director of the Department of Community and Health Services (DCHS) for the county.

The majority of the money was [COVID-19 relief funding](#) and all federal handouts required a paper trail by the local governments who receive it.

When King County started looking at the money it was handing out, it discovered many 'inappropriate' payments, Flor said.

"The vast majority of these payments, 99.99% have gone directly to the landlord," he said.

The average rental assistance payment was \$10,900, according to Flor.

However, he said the county has uncovered at least 130 cases where payments ranged from \$20,000 to \$45,000.

Flor said he wouldn't characterize the payments as fraud.

"We are still investigating," Flor said. "In some cases, a [landlord might have claimed money on behalf of a tenant](#), and the tenant was not aware of that they were being claimed."

He says some people stated receiving a 1099-Miscellaneous income statement from the county because the relief money can be taxable.

"We are getting people who are reporting back and saying that's not me, you sent this to me, I did not receive this money, I did not apply for this funding, I believe there might have been identity theft," said Flor.

A statement from DCHS says the inappropriate payments total less than one percent of the \$318.5 million distributed so far.

Of the 130 cases, [30 were caught prior to the funds being distributed](#) and the remaining cases range from identity theft (14%), misrepresenting leasing documents (60%), or were flagged by a financial institution's fraud department or third-party report (26%).

The county has now hired a third-party auditor to investigate.

"We do expect to find more and we'll do what we can to recover that funding and get it back into the hands that need it," Flor said.

One group that says it could use more rental assistance funding is the Housing Justice Project. It's a group of attorneys with an office inside the King County Courthouse that advocates for people facing eviction before they appear before a judge.

"We are starting to see a lot of families who are being evicted for small amounts of money," said Edmund Witter, the senior managing attorney with the Housing Justice Project. "The other day, we had a case of \$460, which was a third of the rent."

The Project also hands out [emergency rental assistance](#) and could run out of funds when federal funds are expected to run dry this summer. It also is looking for a new contract with the county to continue its work.

"My big concern right now is what's going to happen when this money is not there," says Witter. "What's the effort that the county is going to make, the city is going to make, that the state is going to make to provide that support because this not just a tenant issue, it's a landlord issue as well."

HEADLINE	04/08 Japan expels Russia diplomats, sanctions
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-tokyo-europe-moscow-690708cd044183c5a27b0fa0bc6589d0
GIST	<p>TOKYO (AP) — Japan announced Friday it is expelling eight Russian diplomats and trade officials and will phase out imports of Russian coal and oil because of Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said Japan will also ban imports of Russian lumber, vodka and other goods, and will prohibit new Japanese investment in Russia.</p> <p>It will also step up financial sanctions against Russian banks and freeze assets of about 400 more individuals and groups, including military-linked organizations, Kishida said at a news conference.</p> <p>He said Russia must be held accountable for “war crimes” in Ukraine, including atrocities against civilians and attacks on nuclear facilities, that are “severe violations of international law and are absolutely impermissible.”</p> <p>“We are at a critical moment in our efforts to get Russia to stop its cruel invasion of Ukraine and restore peace. Everyone, please cooperate,” Kishida said, referring to the sanctions’ impact on Japanese people, such as higher prices for gasoline, electricity and food.</p> <p>Earlier Friday, the Foreign Ministry announced it is expelling eight Russian diplomats and trade officials. European countries have already expelled dozens of Russian diplomats as their relationships have plunged over Moscow’s war against Ukraine.</p> <p>Europe and the United States have also stepped up sanctions against Russia, including restrictions on coal imports, following revelations of harrowing atrocities against civilians in Ukrainian cities.</p> <p>Kishida said the additional sanctions are in line with an agreement by the Group of Seven advanced industrialized nations.</p> <p>The measures contained in a G-7 leaders’ statement include a phasing out or banning of imports of Russian coal and oil. Japanese trade minister Koichi Hagiuda said Japan plans to gradually reduce its energy reliance on Russia while seeking ways to reduce the burden on Japanese companies.</p> <p>Japan has already imposed a series of sanctions, including freezing assets of top Russian officials such as President Vladimir Putin, restricting exports to Russia of goods including sensitive items transferrable to military use, and removing key banks from an international messaging system.</p> <p>Japan is taking a greater role in the international effort against Russia’s invasion of Ukraine because of concerns about its impact on East Asia, where China’s military has grown increasingly assertive.</p> <p>Japan has already faced reprisals from Russia. Moscow recently announced the suspension of talks on a peace treaty with Tokyo that include negotiations over Russian-held islands which the Soviet Union seized from Japan at the end of World War II.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 Food prices soar to record levels
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-health-europe-united-nations-fe2cc912195478f0dd861e6252c8f3b3
GIST	<p>ROME (AP) — Prices for food commodities like grains and vegetable oils reached their highest levels ever last month largely because of Russia’s war in Ukraine and the “massive supply disruptions” it is causing, threatening millions of people in Africa, the Middle East elsewhere with hunger and malnourishment, the United Nations said Friday.</p>

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization said its Food Price Index, which tracks monthly changes in international prices for a basket of commodities, averaged 159.3 points last month, up 12.6% from February. As it is, the February index was the highest level since its inception in 1990.

FAO said the [war in Ukraine](#) was largely responsible for the 17.1% rise in the price of grains, including wheat and others like oats, barley and corn. Together, Russia and [Ukraine account for around 30% and 20% of global wheat](#) and corn exports, respectively.

While predictable given February's steep rise, "this is really remarkable," said Josef Schmidhuber, deputy director of FAO's markets and trade division. "Clearly, these very [high prices for food require urgent action](#)."

The biggest price increases were for vegetable oils: that price index rose 23.2%, driven by higher quotations for sunflower seed oil that is used for cooking. Ukraine is the world's leading exporter of sunflower oil, and Russia is No. 2.

"There is, of course, a massive supply disruption, and that massive supply disruption from the Black Sea region has fueled prices for vegetable oil," Schmidhuber told reporters in Geneva.

He said he couldn't calculate how much the war was to blame for the record food prices, noting that poor weather conditions in the United States and China also were blamed for crop concerns. But he said "logistical factors" were playing a big role.

"Essentially, there are no exports through the Black Sea, and exports through the Baltics is practically also coming to an end," he said.

Soaring food prices and disruption to supplies coming from Russia and Ukraine have threatened food shortages in countries in the Middle East, Africa and parts of Asia where [many people already were not getting enough to eat](#).

Those nations rely on affordable supplies of wheat and other grains from the Black Sea region to feed millions of people who subsist on subsidized bread and bargain noodles, and they now face the possibility of further political instability.

Other large grain producers like the United States, Canada, France, Australia and Argentina are being closely watched to see [if they can quickly ramp up production](#) to fill in the gaps, but farmers face issues like climbing fuel and fertilizer costs exacerbated by the war, drought and supply chain disruptions.

In the Sahel region of Central and West Africa, the disruptions from the war have added to an already precarious food situation caused by COVID-19, conflicts, poor weather and other structural problems, said Sib Ollo, senior researcher for the World Food Program for West and Central Africa in Dakar, Senegal.

"There is a sharp deterioration of the food and nutrition security in the region," he told reporters, saying 6 million children are malnourished and nearly 16 million people in urban areas are at risk of food insecurity.

Farmers, he said, were particularly worried that they would not be able to access fertilizers produced in the Black Sea region. Russia is a leading global exporter.

"The cost of fertilizers has increased by almost 30% in many places of this region due to the supply disruption that we see provoked by a crisis in Ukraine," he said.

The World Food Program has appealed for \$777 million to meet the needs of 22 million people in the Sahel region and Nigeria over six months, he said.

To address the needs of food-importing countries, the FAO was developing a proposal for a mechanism to alleviate the import costs for the poorest countries, Schmidhuber said. The proposal calls for eligible

	countries to commit to added investments in their own agricultural productivity to obtain import credits to help soften the blow.
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HEADLINE	04/07 Retirements fuel workforce shortage
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/retirement-labor-force-dropouts-march-morning-consult/
GIST	<p>The U.S. labor market has a people problem: There simply aren't enough workers available to take the jobs employers want to fill. That's partly due to a trend hastened by the pandemic that is continuing apace even as the economy returns to normal: Americans are retiring in droves.</p> <p>Retiring workers made up the biggest share of Americans who dropped out of the labor force in March, according to a new analysis from Morning Consult. That pickup comes after several months during which retirement rates eased somewhat, with some older workers returning to the labor force.</p> <p>But the recent uptick in retirements may signal that some older workers are questioning whether they want to cope with changes like the widespread shift to hybrid-work environments, with more companies asking workers to come to the office a few days a week, noted John Leer, chief economist at Morning Consult. And as the pandemic enters its third year, some may simply be aging into retirement as part of the long-standing demographic shift of America's aging baby boomer generation.</p> <p>The upshot: Don't expect older workers to return to the labor market to rescue the economy from labor shortages, Leer said.</p> <p>"There are a lot of retirees that have dropped from the labor force, and that has been an open question about when they'll come back," Leer told CBS MoneyWatch. But, he added, "that's not going to be the case. We shouldn't rely on older workers to be the driving force of jobs growth going forward."</p> <p>Between February and March, the share of working-age adults who either had a job or were looking for one declined by almost 1 percentage point, giving up most of the progress made since March 2021, Morning Consult found. About half of that change was due to people retiring, with the rest due to issues like disability and child care.</p> <p>To be sure, the data reflects only a one-month change, but it underlines the ongoing pressures facing the job market. The labor force participation rate — the share of adults who are working or who are looking for a job — still hasn't returned to its pre-pandemic level despite predictions at various points in the past year that the nation's missing workers would eventually return.</p> <p>But long-term demographic changes are straining America's workforce, Leer said. "Structural issues with immigration, retirements and an aging population were there before the pandemic. We are fighting an uphill battle to get people back into the workforce."</p> <p>Why high-income workers quit</p> <p>In some ways, the increase in Americans choosing to retire is surprising given that the highest inflation in 40 years is eating away at savings and investments. But people who are at or near retirement age may have benefited from the run-up in asset values during the past two years, such as housing and investments, experts say.</p> <p>Higher-income adults — those earning more than \$100,000 a year — were twice as likely as lower-income workers to say they quit because they retired or because their job required them to work too many hours, Morning Consult found.</p> <p>"Inflation poses a very real risk for higher-income adults, and you'd think that would push them back into the labor market, so that's one of the surprising things" about the findings, Leer said. Some older, higher-income workers may be deciding that the ongoing uncertainties about the pandemic and changes in the workplace just aren't worth it, he noted.</p>

Meanwhile, current workers are more worried about retirement than actual retirees, a recent [study](#) from Allianz Life found. About 63% of people who are working say they fear running out of money in retirement more than death, the study found, compared with 46% of retirees. That disparity could be due to the rise in asset values during the past two years, which have buoyed the fortunes of many older Americans.

"Some people are so well prepared they are retiring early," said Kelly LaVigne, vice president of consumer insights at Allianz Life, about his company's report.

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HEADLINE	04/08 Sneaky ways Russians slam Putin
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-sneaky-way-artists-in-russia-are-still-slamming-vladimir-putins-war-in-ukraine?ref=home
GIST	<p>The image of a dead man with his hands tied up behind his back on the ground in the Ukrainian town of Bucha has become a horrific symbol of Russia's war. He was photographed bloodied, wearing jeans, sneakers and a brown hooded jacket, his hands bound by white cloth.</p> <p>Days after that photo went viral, that same figure reappeared all over Moscow, where an unknown performance artist photographed himself laying on the ground, wearing similar clothes with his hands tied in front of the city's most famous landmarks in a street art protest he called <i>Moscow-Bucha</i>.</p> <p>Like him, hundreds of Russian artists have taken to the streets to paint anti-war graffiti in Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Tver, Kaliningrad, Nizhny Novgorod and other cities. Many of them are tracked down and arrested, but some get away with it. Even now, a naked mannequin covered in fake blood is lying inside a half-demolished old building in downtown Nizhny Novgorod. The word "Gruz" is written on its back, a reference to the Russian code word for soldiers killed in action. The graffiti above the mannequin reads: "Stop the War."</p> <p>A well-known Russian architect, Sergei Sitar, hung a 10-meter Ukrainian flag painted with the words "Freedom. Truth. Peace." on the Crimean Bridge in the center of Moscow last month. He was later sentenced to 15 days in prison over the protest by a Moscow court. Another street artist, known as the Blue Pencil, painted words on a wall in Nizhny Novgorod: "The power is in truth. It is banned on the territory of the Russian federation," it read. Nearby, he drew a long black rectangle resembling censored text ending in an exclamation mark. "Russian authorities, because they do not change have become rotten, they turn Russia into a totalitarian state," the Blue Pencil artist told The Daily Beast in an interview.</p> <p>The tradition of political street art has deep roots in Russia. Back in 1976, the Soviet Union's first non-conformist artist, Yuliy Rybakov, and his friends painted a 40-meter long statement on the wall of the Peter and Paul fortress in Leningrad, which read: "You crucify freedom but the human soul knows no fetters!"</p> <p>Today, Russian artists stand together with Ukraine, and despite efforts to quash their protests, more anti-war art keeps appearing on the walls of Russian cities in a country where almost all opposition to the Kremlin has been silenced. Street art remains one of the only places where free expression is possible.</p> <p>A young Saint Petersburg artist, Zhenya Isayeva, followed Rybakov's example earlier this month. Wearing a light white dress, she poured red paint all over herself in a protest against the bloodshed in Ukraine. "My heart is bleeding!," she shouted, while standing on the steps of a historical building in central Nevsky Prospect until police detained her and a court sentenced her to eight days in jail.</p> <p>"We see many anti-war artists and poets in Russia today because there is no free media left for expressing the horror that people feel," Galina Artemenko, an art observer from Saint Petersburg, told The Daily Beast. "Isayeva is a serious artist from a family of artists, who have lived in Saint Petersburg for 200 years, she follows a long tradition of political art protests."</p>

Almost every day, Anna Nistratova, a Russian street art expert, finds new anti-war murals on the walls of Nizhny Novgorod. “Young street artists feel frustrated and angry, their statements on the walls play almost a therapeutic role for many people who disagree with what is happening,” Nistratova told The Daily Beast. “People walk along a giant wall, see a tiny ‘Stop the War’ graffiti and realize they are not alone.”

An internationally recognized Russian contemporary artist, Pavel Otdelnov, recently created a series of snow-themed paintings called *A Field for Experiments*. Snow is a Russian folk symbol for death. One of his paintings, called *Geopolitician*, depicted President Vladimir Putin’s head sticking out of a field covered in snow. “This is the image of a man who is controlling vast territories of land but he is totally lonely and half-buried in snow,” Otdelnov told The Daily Beast. “I have never felt as bad as I feel now, I cannot find a place for myself, so I try to paint so as not to fall into depression,” Otdelnov said.

Other Russian artists, like the “The Party of the Dead Souls” group are turning to more direct forms of protests. Last month, they gathered in a Moscow cemetery wearing skull masks and holding [banners](#) highlighting the deaths of Russian soldiers in Ukraine. Their protest was viewed as a challenge to Russian propaganda, the lack of information about the war, and the Kremlin’s official dubious death toll when it comes to reporting Russian casualties. “This is a time for art actionism, for direct statements, like the recent performance by the Party of the Dead Souls,” Otdelnov told The Daily Beast.

At a time when citizens are arrested just for reciting classical poems with the word “war” in Russian public squares, it takes an unbelievable amount of courage for artists to take a stand against Putin’s increasingly oppressive regime.

“Some artists see the war as a challenge, as the time when we need to use art methods in the city environment,” the Blue Pencil told The Daily Beast. “As a street artist, I try to say that the war and murders should be stopped on the territory of Ukraine right now, I try to find [a way] to describe the horrors of the war.”

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HEADLINE	04/08 EU imposes sanctions Putin daughters
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/eu-imposes-sanctions-putins-daughters-83955191
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS -- The European Union has imposed sanctions on two adult daughters of Russian President Vladimir Putin as part of a new package of measures targeting Russia's economy, businessmen and oligarchs in retaliation for the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine, according to two EU officials.</p> <p>The EU included Maria Vorontsova and Katerina Tikhonova in its updated list of individuals facing an assets freeze and travel ban. The two EU officials from different EU member countries spoke Friday on condition of anonymity to The Associated Press because the updated list of individuals and entities sanctioned has not been published yet.</p> <p>The move from the European bloc follows a similar move two days earlier by the United States.</p> <p>In the wake of evidence of torture and killings emerging from war zones outside Kyiv, the EU decided to impose a fifth package of measures.</p> <p>“These latest sanctions were adopted following the atrocities committed by Russian armed forces in Bucha and other places under Russian occupation,” said Josep Borrell, the EU's top diplomat. “The aim of our sanctions is to stop the reckless, inhuman and aggressive behavior of the Russian troops and make clear to the decision makers in the Kremlin that their illegal aggression comes at a heavy cost.”</p> <p>In addition to sanctions on individuals and members of their families, oligarchs and high-ranking Kremlin officials, the 27-nation bloc also formally approved Friday an embargo on coal imports starting in August, as well as a full transaction ban on four key Russian banks representing 23% of market share in the Russian banking sector.</p>

	<p>Also, vessels registered under the Russian flag are now prohibited to access EU ports, with an exception for agricultural and food products, humanitarian aid and energy.</p> <p>This is the first time that EU sanctions target Russia's lucrative energy industry over its war in Ukraine. According to the EU council, imports of coal into the region are currently worth 8 billion euros per year.</p> <p>The EU has already started working on additional sanctions, including on oil imports.</p> <p>EU officials said the impact of the bloc's sanctions so far over the first four weeks shows that imports into the 27 nations from Russia dropped off by 9% in terms of value, and over 20% in terms of volume. Trade from the EU to Russia has fallen by three quarters.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 Ukraine: more gruesome discoveries ahead
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ukrainian-leaders-predict-gruesome-discoveries-ahead-83953084
GIST	<p>CHERNIHIV, Ukraine -- Ukrainian leaders predicted more gruesome discoveries would be made in reclaimed cities and towns after retreating Russian forces left behind crushed buildings, streets strewn with destroyed cars and mounting civilian casualties that drew condemnation across the globe.</p> <p>President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the horrors of Bucha, a town north of Kyiv where bodies of people killed at close range were found on streets and in basements, already had surfaced in a worse way in Borodianka, another settlement outside the capital.</p> <p>“And what will happen when the world learns the whole truth about what the Russian troops did in Mariupol?” Zelenskyy said late Thursday, referring to the besieged southern port that has seen some of the greatest suffering since Russia invaded Ukraine. “There on every street is what the world saw in Bucha and other towns in the Kyiv region after the departure of the Russian troops. The same cruelty. The same terrible crimes.”</p> <p>After failing to take Kyiv, Russia shifted its focus to the Donbas, a mostly Russian-speaking, industrial region in eastern Ukraine where Moscow-backed rebels have been fighting Ukrainian forces for eight years. Ukrainian officials warned residents this week to leave as soon as possible.</p> <p>In a sign of the intense fighting expected to come, Ukrainian authorities said a rocket strike Friday killed more than 30 people and wounded over 100 at a train station in Kramatorsk, a city in the eastern Donetsk region, that was being used to evacuate civilians.</p> <p>Regional governor Pavlo Kyrylenko said thousands of people were at the train station at the time of the strike, preparing to head to safer regions.</p> <p>A Kremlin spokesman acknowledged that Russia has suffered major troop casualties during its six-week military operation in Ukraine.</p> <p>“Yes, we have significant losses of troops and it is a huge tragedy for us,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Sky News.</p> <p>Peskov also hinted the fighting might be over “in the foreseeable future,” telling Sky that Russian troops were “doing their best to bring an end to that operation.”</p> <p>Spurred by reports that Russian forces committed atrocities in areas surrounding the capital, NATO nations agreed to increase their supply of arms after Ukraine's foreign minister pleaded for weapons from the alliance and other sympathetic countries to help face down an expected offensive in the east.</p>

Bucha Mayor Anatoliy Fedoruk said investigators found at least three sites of mass shootings of civilians during the Russian occupation. Most victims died from gunshots, not from shelling, he said, and some corpses with their hands tied were “dumped like firewood” into mass graves, including one at a children’s camp.

Fedoruk said 320 civilians were confirmed dead as of Wednesday, but he expected more as bodies are found in the city that was home to 50,000 people. Only 3,700 remain, he said.

In his nightly address, Zelenskyy said Bucha’s horrors may be only the beginning. In the northern city of Borodianka, just 30 kilometers (20 miles) northwest of Bucha, he warned of even more casualties, saying “there it is much more horrible.”

Ukrainian and several Western leaders have blamed the massacres on Moscow’s troops. The weekly magazine Der Spiegel reported Germany’s foreign intelligence agency intercepted radio messages among Russian soldiers discussing killings of civilians. Russia has falsely claimed that the scenes in Bucha were staged.

On Thursday, a day after Russian forces began shelling their village in the southern Mykolaiv region, Sergei Dubovienko, 52, drove north in his small blue Lada with his wife and mother-in-law to Bashtanka, where they sought shelter in a church.

“They started destroying the houses and everything” in Pavlo-Marianovka, he said. “Then the tanks appeared from the forest. We thought that in the morning there would be shelling again, so I decided to leave.”

Hundreds of people have fled villages in the Mykolaiv and Kherson regions that are either under attack or occupied by Russian forces.

Marina Morozova and her husband fled from Kherson, the first major city to fall to the Russians.

“They are waiting for a big battle. We saw shells that did not explode. It was horrifying,” she said.

Morozova, 69, said only Russian television and radio was available. The Russians handed out humanitarian aid, she said, and filmed the distribution.

Anxious to keep moving away from Russian troops, the couple and others boarded a van that would take them west. Some will try to leave the country, while others will remain in quieter parts of Ukraine.

The United Nations estimates the war has displaced at least 6.5 million people within the country.

The U.N. refugee agency, UNHCR, said that more than 4.3 million, half of them children, have left Ukraine since Russia launched its invasion on Feb. 24 and sparked Europe’s largest refugee crisis since World War II.

The International Organization for Migration estimates more than 12 million people are stranded in areas of Ukraine under attack.

The United Nations’ humanitarian chief told The Associated Press on Thursday that he’s “not optimistic” about securing a cease-fire after meeting with officials in Kyiv and in Moscow this week, given the lack of trust between the sides. He spoke hours after Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused Ukraine of backtracking on proposals it had made over Crimea and Ukraine’s military status.

Two top European Union officials and the prime minister of Slovakia traveled to Kyiv on Friday, looking to shore up the EU’s support for Ukraine. Prime Minister Eduard Heger said he, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell have trade and humanitarian aid proposals for Zelenskyy and his government.

Part of that, Heger says is “to offer options for transporting grains, including wheat.” Ukraine is a major world wheat supplier and Russia’s war on Ukraine is creating shortages, notably in the Middle East.

Western nations have stepped up sanctions, and the Group of Seven major world powers warned that they will keep adding measures until Russian troops leave Ukraine.

The U.S. Congress voted Thursday to suspend normal trade relations with Russia and ban the importation of its oil, while the EU approved other new steps, including an embargo on coal imports. The U.N. General Assembly, meanwhile, voted to suspend Russia from the world organization’s leading human rights body.

U.S. President Joe Biden said the U.N. vote demonstrated how “Putin’s war has made Russia an international pariah.” He called the images coming from Bucha “horrificing.”

“The signs of people being raped, tortured, executed — in some cases having their bodies desecrated — are an outrage to our common humanity,” Biden said.

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HEADLINE	04/07 Ukraine: Russia uses ‘mobile crematoriums’
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/russia-accused-mobile-crematoriums-incinerate-civilians-mariupol/story?id=83932376
GIST	<p>In one of the creepiest allegations to emerge from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin is being accused by Ukrainian officials of using "mobile crematoriums" to incinerate dead civilians in a deliberate effort to cover-up alleged war crimes in the hard-hit city of Mariupol.</p> <p>Mariupol Mayor Vadym Boychenko made the charge this week, saying he heard eyewitness accounts of Russian soldiers driving around Mariupol with crematoriums on lorries and collecting bodies of civilians while at the same time barring the International Committee of the Red Cross from entering the city with humanitarian aid.</p> <p>"The world has not seen the scale of the tragedy in Mariupol since the existence of Nazis concentration camps," Boychenko said on Tuesday. "The Russians have turned our entire city into a death camp. Unfortunately, the creepy analogy is getting more and more confirmation."</p> <p>In a statement released on its Facebook account, the Mariupol City Council said, "witnesses have seen evidence Russia is operating mobile crematoria in Mariupol, burning the bodies of dead civilians and covering up evidence of war crimes."</p> <p>The statement added "this is why Russia is not in a hurry" to let the ICRC and other human rights watch groups into Mariupol to rescue civilians still trapped there.</p> <p>Boychenko and the city council said the portable human furnaces showed up in Mariupol after reports of alleged atrocities at the hands of Russian troops emerged in Bucha, a suburb of the capital city Kyiv. Ukrainian officials reported that at least 410 civilians were killed in Bucha, including many found with their hands tied behind their backs and shot in the head.</p> <p>Boychenko said his once-thriving port city of 400,000 people has been completely decimated by bombing raids and estimated that around 5,000 people there have been killed.</p> <p>U.S. defense officials told ABC News they have not confirmed the allegations that Russia is using mobile crematoriums to hide evidence of war crimes.</p> <p>Rep. Seth Moulton, D-Massachusetts, told ABC News on Thursday that he is not surprised by the reports.</p>

Moulton, a former Marine and a member of the House Armed Services Committee, said that during a 2015 fact-finding mission in Ukraine that he went on with other House members, "credible sources" informed him that the Russian Army was using mobile crematoriums on its own soldiers in the Russian occupied Crimea, Ukraine. He said the sources told him Russia was using the devices to cover up the number of its soldiers killed in Crimea.

"We heard this from a variety of sources over there, enough that I was confident in the veracity of the information," Moulton said. "None of that has changed. That is absolutely what was going on back then and I'm now hearing reports, unsurprisingly, that it's happening again."

Moulton said he has no reason to discount reports from Ukrainian officials that Russia is using the incinerators to hide new war crimes.

"The bottom line is this is nothing new for the Russian Army and Vladimir Putin," Moulton said.

In an interview with Turkish media this week, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy alleged that Russian soldiers were "cleaning up" before allowing aid workers into the heavily bombed Mariupol.

Pressure has been mounting from the international community to bring war crimes against Putin and other Russian officials. The international criminal court in The Hague has launched an investigation into the atrocities allegedly committed against Ukrainian civilians by Russian troops since the invasion started on Feb. 24.

A report released Thursday by Amnesty International claims Russian forces have committed numerous war crimes throughout Ukraine. The organization said its crisis response investigators interviewed more than 20 people from villages and towns near Kyiv and many claimed to have witnessed civilian executions.

The United Nations General Assembly on Thursday voted to pass a resolution to suspend Russia from the U.N. Human Rights Council in response to Russian forces' alleged killings of civilians in Ukraine.

"I'm not sure who needs more proof that Russia is committing war crimes," Moulton told ABC News. "They're trying to cover their tracks."

Russia has denied committing atrocities and targeting civilians.

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HEADLINE	04/07 Japan, Philippines to step up security ties
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/japan-philippines-step-security-ties-amid-china-worry-83935171
GIST	<p>TOKYO -- The defense ministers of Japan and the Philippines agreed Thursday to bolster security cooperation and expand joint drills between their forces as they shared concerns about China's increasingly assertive military actions in the region.</p> <p>Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi and his Philippine counterpart, Delfin Lorenzana, also shared concern about Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its impact in the Indo-Pacific, and noted that any attempts to change the status quo by force is unacceptable, Japan's Defense Ministry said in a statement that avoided identifying China by name.</p> <p>Japan has significantly expanded joint drills with the United States and other partners, including Australia, India, France, Britain and Germany, that share its concerns about China's assertion of its territorial claims in the region, which has some of the world's busiest sea lanes.</p> <p>Japan is especially concerned about Chinese military and coast guard activity in the East China Sea near the Japanese-controlled Senkaku islands, which China also claims and calls Diaoyu.</p>

	<p>On Thursday, Japan's Defense Ministry said it spotted a Chinese Y-9 electronic warfare aircraft flying over the Sakishima islands, although it did not violate Japanese airspace.</p> <p>Kishi and Lorenzana also agreed to increase cooperation in defense equipment and technology transfer between the two countries. Tokyo and Manila agreed in 2020 on the Japanese export of air radar systems to the Philippine military.</p> <p>For Japan, the Philippines is geopolitically important as China increases its influence in the region.</p> <p>China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei have been locked in an increasingly tense territorial standoff in the busy waterway for decades.</p> <p>The defense ministers will be joined by foreign ministers from each country on Saturday for the first “two plus two” security talks between the two countries.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Covid cases spike among Washington elite
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/washington-elite-faced-growing-resurgence-covid-19-infections/story?id=83934382
GIST	<p>With masks no longer required and mitigation measures seen by some as a thing of the past, a coronavirus resurgence is spreading among the tight circles of the Washington elite.</p> <p>On Thursday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi became the latest high-profile Washington dignitary to test positive for COVID-19.</p> <p>Pelosi, 82, is currently asymptomatic, according to a spokesperson for her office.</p> <p>“The Speaker is fully vaccinated and boosted, and is thankful for the robust protection the vaccine has provided,” the spokesperson said Thursday. She said Pelosi received her second booster shot last month.</p> <p>Pelosi’s positive test comes amid a flurry of other positive cases among individuals who attended the elite Gridiron Club Dinner in Washington on Saturday.</p> <p>As of midday Thursday, at least 32 guests at Saturday’s dinner have tested positive for COVID-19, Tom DeFrank, the president of the Gridiron Club, told ABC News.</p> <p>Attorney General Merrick Garland, Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, Reps. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., and Joaquin Castro, D-Texas, and Jamal Simmons, the communications director for Vice President Kamala Harris, were among the guests at the dinner who announced this week that they have tested positive.</p> <p>Late Thursday, first lady Jill Biden's press secretary, Michael LaRosa, another attendee at the dinner, told ABC News he'd tested positive. He said he has mild symptoms and is isolating at home. He tested negative earlier this week.</p> <p>LaRosa said he was out earlier this week and is not determined to be a close contact of the first lady or president.</p> <p>Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, one of two Republican lawmakers to attend the dinner, also announced late Thursday she tested positive.</p> <p>“Senator Collins has tested positive for COVID-19 and is currently experiencing mild symptoms. The Senator will isolate and work remotely in accordance with CDC guidelines,” a statement from her office said.</p>

Although some attendees were wearing face coverings, most guests were not wearing masks, DeFrank said.

In recent weeks, a growing number of positive COVID-19 infections have also affected members of President Joe Biden's inner circle, with the White House acknowledging many close calls following meetings or events with individuals who subsequently tested positive.

Pelosi attended an event at the White House on Tuesday where she interacted with former President Barack Obama, who tested positive last month, as well as Biden. She also attended an event at the White House Wednesday where she again interacted with Biden. She was maskless at both events, as were other attendees.

Asked about Biden's contact with Pelosi, White House press secretary Jen Psaki on Thursday said Biden tested negative on Wednesday night and insisted Biden wasn't a CDC "close contact" because they weren't within 6 feet for 15 minutes.

Among those close to Biden who have tested positive is his sister, Valerie Biden Owens, who also attended the dinner Saturday. She is experiencing mild symptoms, her publisher said in a statement on Thursday.

Rep. Angie Craig, D-Minn., who attended the Tuesday event with Biden and Harris, announced she tested positive Thursday and was experiencing mild symptoms.

It was unclear whether Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., and Sen. Raphael Warnock, D-Ga., both of whom announced Thursday night they had also tested positive were at the dinner.

Psaki, who recently tested positive for a second time, told reporters on Wednesday that the White House continues to take "stringent" and "strict" protocols to protect the president from potential infection.

"We take additional measures that go beyond what the CDC protocols and requirements are to ensure that we are doing everything we can to keep the principals safe, the president, the vice president and others in the building," Psaki said.

When asked by ABC News whether the White House plans to test the president daily in the coming weeks, given the uptick in COVID-19 cases seen across Washington, Psaki said that such measures have "not deemed to be necessary at this point."

The vice president also had brushes with the virus in recent weeks. In addition to Simmons testing positive this week, her husband Doug Emhoff contracted the virus in mid-March.

Harris will follow guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which recommends that individuals who are up to date on their vaccinations get tested at least five days after interacting with someone with COVID-19, according to her office. As no quarantine is needed, she will continue with her public schedule.

Separately, Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser joined the growing list of those infected with COVID-19, [tweeting on Thursday morning](#) that she had tested positive for the virus.

The mayor said she is experiencing "allergy-like symptoms."

The District of Columbia in February officially ended its district-wide mask mandate. The White House and the U.S. Capitol quickly followed suit to make face coverings optional.

The district is currently at a ["low" community level](#) for COVID-19, per CDC standards.

HEADLINE	04/07 Canada bans foreign home buyers for 2yrs
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Business/wireStory/canada-bans-foreign-home-buyers-years-cool-market-83944097
GIST	<p>OTTAWA, Ontario -- Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government announced Thursday it will ban foreign investors from buying homes in Canada for two years in a bid to cool off a hot housing market.</p> <p>Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland took a number of measures to tamp down speculation and demand amid record home prices in announcing the federal budget for the year.</p> <p>The government announced a two-year ban on foreign home buying as well as higher taxes for people who sell their home within a year, though both measures include multiple exceptions including for permanent residents and foreign students.</p> <p>The budget also includes billions for new housing and measures to help Canadians trying to get into the market, including a new savings account and changes to the first-time home buyers tax credit.</p> <p>The government is under pressure to cool an overheated market after prices climbed by more than 20% last year, while rental rates have also been rising.</p>
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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	04/07 Check devices: 3G shutdown underway
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/home-and-office/networking/3g-shutdown-is-underway-check-your-devices-now-for-safety-sake/
GIST	<p>3G is shutting down and some of your most essential tech may soon become unusable.</p> <p>What steered the evolution of how we use, interact, and communicate with technology 20 years ago will officially retire by the end of 2022, with major US carriers repurposing their satellites over the course of the year. In its place: 5G, the next-generation network that promises considerably faster speeds than 4G LTE and a more unified system for Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Internet of Things (IoT) expansion.</p> <p>So, what does this all mean for older hardware like cellphones, alarms, and GPS systems that thrive on the 3G spectrum? To put it bluntly, many of the network-driven features will become obsolete, presenting some unforeseen dangers.</p> <p>Fortunately, there are steps that you and your loved ones can take to safely transition from aging to future-proof tech. In some cases, manufacturers may even be able to give your older gadgets new life through software upgrades.</p> <p>Here is everything you need to know about the "3G sunset", how it will affect the technology that you use, and what you can do to stay afloat in the ever-changing landscape.</p> <p>When are carriers shutting down 3G?</p> <p>While carriers have been planning the closure of 3G since 4G LTE took the reins (and the prospect of 5G being another catalyst) the agenda took a pause during the pandemic. Over the past two years, 3G-reliant services like home security systems and tech for the elderly have become more essential than ever, keeping telecommunications companies from pulling the plug. That is, until 2022, with major US carriers finally giving in and setting new shutdown dates that span across the year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AT&T is the first of the big three, closing its 3G network on February 22, 2022. • T-Mobile has pushed its 3G shutdown to July 1, 2022, after initially planning for an October closing in 2021. • Sprint, now merged with T-Mobile, will close its 3G network on May 31, 2022.

- Verizon's 3G network will shut off on December 31, 2022. The carrier has [made it clear](#) that "the date will not be extended again."

You can find more information regarding when the 3G networks close on [FCC's website](#).

Will my phone still work?

For the greater portion of the 3G era, smartphones enabled users to browse the web, share viral videos, update statuses, and connect with people from around the world. That all remains possible through 4G LTE, 5G, and Wi-Fi networks. With 3G turned off, the iPhone 3GS, for example, won't be able to make calls or text messages, but can still connect to Wi-Fi to access internet-based applications.

According to the [CTIA](#), "fewer than nine percent of the US wireless connections are 2G or 3G subscriptions." If you're using a smartphone that launched after 2014, you likely won't experience any setbacks from the 3G shutdown. The same applies to flip phones that were released after 2017. Unsure of what year your device was manufactured? The best solution is to check with your local carrier -- in person or online -- to see if there are any compatibility issues.

Carriers like T-Mobile and Verizon are also reaching out to 3G customers to help with the transition to 4G and 5G service plans. We're seeing trade-in offers and incentives that will have your 3G-supported phone swapped with a 5G-supported one for free. And for low-income consumers, the FCC's [Lifeline program](#) will discount qualifying monthly telephone and internet services, making the conversion all the more accessible.

In general, if you or a loved one are using an older phone, this is your call to upgrade.

How will the 3G shutdown affect my car?

Besides ushering in the revolution of smartphones, 3G has played a foundational role in the navigation and alarm-based systems that we rely on during our everyday commutes. With the institution of faster and more reliable 5G, roadside assistance and emergency crash alerts are among the many network-based features that will be affected by the shutting down of 3G. Many cars also have an emergency SOS button that, when pressed, dials to first responders via 3G. That, too, will lose functionality.

Vehicles from popular automakers like Toyota, Lexus, Nissan, Hyundai, Dodge, [and more](#) released before 2019 are susceptible to the issues mentioned above. The main reason that newer models still carry 3G receivers, according to Roger Lancot, director of automotive connected mobility at Strategy Analytics, is for automakers to save on manufacturing costs.

To stay ahead of the curve, you'll want to ensure that your car supports or can receive hardware upgrades to connect to 4G. As with smartphones, your best bet to stay in the know is by consulting with your local car dealer. While the modification may come in the form of downloadable software or physical spare parts, it will help to keep your vehicle up to date and functioning -- especially during times of danger.

How will it affect my home security?

For the past decades, home security and alarm systems have relied on 3G to communicate and monitor suspicious activities. With the 3G shutdown, that line of communication between the home and its service's central monitoring station becomes non-existent, leaving people who live alone and elders vulnerable.

Fortunately, over the course of the pandemic, many home security companies have proactively been migrating customers from 3G to 4G networks, ensuring that their services remain operational, even after the 3G spectrum is taken down. Unlike smartphones and cars that require disassembling or full-on upgrades, adding 4G functionality to security systems is as simple as having a technician install an external receiver (usually a box or panel).

If you or someone you know is subscribed to a home security plan (ADT, Vivint, SimpliSafe, etc.) a customer representative should have reached out by phone or mail regarding the transition. If not, services like ADT allow you to [schedule a free appointment](#) via phone or website to get the conversion started.

Other tech that will be affected

Besides the categories mentioned above, there is a plethora of gadgets and services that rely on the older-generation network which you may not have been aware of. If you own any of the following, make sure to contact the manufacturer and ask what the next steps are. Depending on how old the product is, you may be eligible for a hardware or software upgrade.

- Medical alert devices (fall detectors, communicators, etc.)
- Fire alarms
- Inventory trackers
- Smartwatches
- E-readers (Kindles, Nooks, etc.)
- GPS trackers (including for pets)
- Marine safety devices

Bottom line

With the imminent sunset of 3G, take a moment out of your day to check your devices (as well as those of your loved ones) to ensure that everything is up to date and geared for the future. As technology progresses and new advances replace the old, businesses and customers alike must learn, adapt, and embrace the change so the tech we rely on every day can continue to keep ourselves and those around us safe and informed.

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HEADLINE	04/07 New Octo banking Trojan via fake apps
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/04/new-octo-banking-trojan-spreading-via.html
GIST	<p>A number of rogue Android apps that have been cumulatively installed from the official Google Play Store more than 50,000 times are being used to target banks and other financial entities.</p> <p>The rental banking trojan, dubbed Octo, is said to be a rebrand of another Android malware called ExobotCompact, which, in turn, is a "lite" replacement for its Exobot predecessor, Dutch mobile security firm ThreatFabric said in a report shared with The Hacker News.</p> <p>Exobot is also likely said to have paved the way for a separate descendant called Coper, that was initially discovered targeting Colombian users around July 2021, with newer infections targeting Android users in different European Countries.</p> <p>"Coper malware apps are modular in design and include a multi-stage infection method and many defensive tactics to survive removal attempts," Cybersecurity company Cyble noted in an analysis of the malware last month.</p> <p>Like other Android banking trojans, the rogue apps are nothing more than droppers, whose primary function is to deploy the malicious payload embedded within them. The list of Octo and Coper droppers used by multiple threat actors is below -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pocket Screencaster (com.moh.screen)• Fast Cleaner 2021 (vizeeva.fast.cleaner)• Play Store (com.restthe71)• Postbank Security (com.carbuildz)• Pocket Screencaster (com.cutthousandjs)• BAWAG PSK Security (com.frontwonder2), and• Play Store app install (com.theseeye5)

These apps, which pose as Play Store app installer, screen recording, and financial apps, are "powered by inventive distribution schemes," distributing them through the Google Play store and via fraudulent landing pages that purportedly alert users to download a browser update.

The droppers, once installed, act as a conduit to launch the trojans, but not before requesting users to enable the [Accessibility Services](#) that allow it a wide breadth of capabilities to exfiltrate sensitive information from the compromised phones.

Octo, the revised version of ExobotCompact, is also equipped to perform on-device fraud by gaining remote control over the devices by taking advantage of the accessibility permissions as well as Android's [MediaProjection API](#) to capture screen contents in real-time.

The ultimate goal, ThreatFabric said, is to trigger the "automatic initiation of fraudulent transactions and its authorization without manual efforts from the operator, thus allowing fraud on a significantly larger scale."

Other notable features of Octo include logging keystrokes, carrying out overlay attacks on banking apps to capture credentials, harvesting contact information, and persistence measures to prevent uninstallation and evade antivirus engines.

"Rebranding to Octo erases previous ties to the Exobot source code leak, inviting multiple threat actors looking for opportunity to rent an allegedly new and original trojan," ThreatFabric noted.

"Its capabilities put at risk not only explicitly targeted applications that are targeted by overlay attack, but any application installed on the infected device as ExobotCompact/Octo is able to read content of any app displayed on the screen and provide the actor with sufficient information to remotely interact with it and perform on-device fraud (ODF)."

The findings come close on the heels of the discovery of a separate Android bankbot named [GodFather](#) — sharing overlaps with the Cereberus and Medusa banking trojans — that has been observed targeting banking users in Europe under the guise of the default Settings app to transfer funds and steal SMS messages, among others.

On top of that, a [new analysis](#) published by AppCensus found 11 apps with more than 46 million installations that were implanted with a third-party SDK named Coelib that made it possible to capture clipboard content, GPS data, email addresses, phone numbers, and even the user's modem router MAC address and network SSID.

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HEADLINE	04/08 Global supply chain attacks surge
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/global-supply-chain-attacks-surge/
GIST	<p>Supply chain attacks on global organizations increased by 51% between July and December 2021, with third-party risk emerging as a key priority, according to new research from the NCC Group.</p> <p>The UK-based information assurance firm polled 1400 security decision-makers at organizations with over 500 employees in 11 countries to better understand supply chain risk.</p> <p>With attacks on the rise, just a third (32%) of responding organizations said they were “very confident” that they could respond “quickly and effectively” to a supply chain breach.</p> <p>The research appeared to reveal some confusion over which party is responsible for preventing, detecting and mitigating supply chain risk. A third (36%) of respondents said their organization was more responsible than their suppliers, while half (53%) said responsibility was equally split.</p>

	<p>NCC Group warned that organizations would increasingly be held responsible by regulators for supply chain risk. It cited the EU's Digital Operational Resilience Act (DORA) which apparently mandates that financial firms include key security requirements in contracts with third-parties.</p> <p>The GDPR also demands more transparency and accountability from every supplier in the chain, with both customer and supplier potentially held responsible in the event of a breach.</p> <p>Half (49%) of the organizations polled by NCC Group said they did not stipulate security standards that their suppliers must adhere to as part of their contracts. A third (34%) claimed they don't regularly monitor or risk assess supplier cybersecurity arrangements.</p> <p>"Many organizations work closely with their suppliers by integrating them into their infrastructures to increase efficiencies and strengthen operations, but this can increase their cyber risk by widening their potential attack surfaces. Security gaps in supply chains can lead to leakage of customer data and serve as entry points for ransomware attacks," warned NCC Group director of remediation Arina Palchik.</p> <p>"Our findings uncovered specific areas for improvement including clarity around responsibility for preventing, detecting and resolving attacks and lax controls for supplier assurance."</p> <p>Supplier risk is now recognized as a top challenge for the next six to 12 months, according to the survey.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 YouTube fraudsters steal \$1.7M
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/youtube-fraudsters-crypto-giveaway/
GIST	<p>A group of online fraudsters made nearly \$1.7m by promising cryptocurrency giveaways on YouTube, according to Group-IB.</p> <p>The Singapore-headquartered security vendor claimed the gang ran 36 YouTube streams between February 16 and 18, attracting at least 165,000 viewers.</p> <p>They used footage of tech entrepreneurs and crypto enthusiasts like Elon Musk, Brad Garlinghouse, Michael Saylor, Changpeng Zhao and Cathie Wood to add legitimacy to their efforts. The channels themselves were either hacked or purchased on the underground market, Group-IB said.</p> <p>The streams they created featured links to at least 29 websites with instructions on how to double cryptocurrency investments. To participate, 'investors' were urged to send a small amount of virtual currency and told they would then receive twice that amount back.</p> <p>Depending on the cryptocurrency and type of wallets used, some victims were asked to enter seed phrases to 'connect' their wallets. However, that enabled the fraudsters to gain control over their wallet and withdraw all funds.</p> <p>Within just three days, the scammers received 281 transactions totaling almost \$1.7m into their crypto wallets. However, the exact number of victims and total amount stolen remains unknown.</p> <p>"The fake crypto giveaway scheme is not new, but apparently is still having a moment. Further analysis of the scammers' domain infrastructure revealed that the 29 websites were part of a massive network of 583 interconnected resources all set up in the first quarter of 2022," said Group-IB.</p> <p>"Notably, there were three times as many domains registered for this scheme in less than three months of 2022 compared to the whole of last year."</p> <p>Group-IB urged crypto enthusiasts to be skeptical of free giveaways and not share confidential data online. Users were also advised to check the legitimacy of any promotions and keep any seed phrases stored securely with a password manager.</p>

HEADLINE	04/07 Microsoft disrupts APT28 domains
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/microsoft/microsoft-takes-down-apt28-domains-used-in-attacks-against-ukraine/
GIST	<p>Microsoft has successfully disrupted attacks against Ukrainian targets coordinated by the Russian APT28 hacking group after taking down seven domains used as attack infrastructure.</p> <p>Strontium (also tracked as Fancy Bear or APT28), linked to Russia's military intelligence service GRU, used these domains to target multiple Ukrainian institutions, including media organizations.</p> <p>The domains were also used in attacks against US and EU government institutions and think tanks involved in foreign policy.</p> <p>"On Wednesday, April 6th, we obtained a court order authorizing us to take control of seven internet domains Strontium was using to conduct these attacks," said Tom Burt, Corporate Vice President of Customer Security & Trust at Microsoft.</p> <p>"We have since re-directed these domains to a sinkhole controlled by Microsoft, enabling us to mitigate Strontium's current use of these domains and enable victim notifications.</p> <p>"We believe Strontium was attempting to establish long-term access to the systems of its targets, provide tactical support for the physical invasion and exfiltrate sensitive information."</p> <p>Microsoft also notified the Ukrainian government about Strontium's malicious activity and the disruption of efforts to compromise targeted organizations' networks in Ukraine.</p> <p>Linked to hacks targeting governments worldwide</p> <p>Before this, Microsoft filed 15 other cases against this Russian-backed threat group in August 2018, leading to the seizure of 91 malicious domains.</p> <p>"This disruption is part of an ongoing long-term investment, started in 2016, to take legal and technical action to seize infrastructure being used by Strontium. We have established a legal process that enables us to obtain rapid court decisions for this work," Burt added.</p> <p>APT28 has been operating since at least 2004 on behalf of Russia's General Staff Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) 85th Main Special Service Center (GTsSS) military unit 26165.</p> <p>Its operators are linked to cyber-espionage campaigns targeting governments worldwide, including a 2015 hack of the German federal parliament and attacks against the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) in 2016.</p> <p>Members of this Russian military hacking unit have been charged by the US for hacking the DNC and the DCCC in 2018, and for targeting and hacking individual members part of the Clinton Campaign.</p> <p>Two years later, the Council of the European Union announced sanctions against multiple APT28 members for their involvement in the 2015 hack of the German Federal Parliament (Deutscher Bundestag).</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Malicious web redirect service infects sites
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/malicious-web-redirect-service-infects-16-500-sites-to-push-malware/
GIST	A new traffic direction system (TDS) called Parrot is relying on servers that host 16,500 websites of universities, local governments, adult content platforms, and personal blogs.

Parrot's use is for malicious campaigns to redirect potential victims matching a specific profile (location, language, operating system, browser) to online resources such as phishing and malware-dropping sites.

Threat actors running malicious campaigns [buy TDS services](#) to filter incoming traffic and send it to a final destination serving malicious content.

TDS are also legitimately used by advertisers and marketers, and some of these services were [exploited in the past](#) to facilitate malspam campaigns.

Used for RAT distribution

Parrot TDS was discovered by threat analysts at Avast, who report that it's currently used for a campaign called FakeUpdate, which delivers remote access trojans (RATs) via fake browser update notices.

The campaign appears to have started in February 2022 but signs of Parrot activity have been traced as far back as October 2021.

“One of the main things that distinguishes Parrot TDS from other TDS is how widespread it is and how many potential victims it has,” [comments Avast in the report](#)

“The compromised websites we found appear to have nothing in common apart from servers hosting poorly secured CMS sites, like WordPress sites.”

Threat actors have planted a malicious web shell on compromised servers and copied it to various locations under similar names that follow a “parroting” pattern.

Moreover, the adversaries use a PHP backdoor script that extracts client information and forwards requests to the Parrot TDS command and control (C2) server.

In some cases, the operators use a shortcut without the PHP script, sending the request directly to the Parrot infrastructure.

Avast says that in March 2022 alone its services protected more than 600,000 of its clients from visiting these infected sites, indicating the massive scale of the Parrot redirection gateway.

Most of the users targeted by these malicious redirections were in Brazil, India, the United States, Singapore, and Indonesia.

As Avast details in the report, the particular campaign's user profile and filtering are so fine-tuned that the malicious actors can target a specific person from thousands of redirected users.

This is achieved by sending that target to unique payload-dropping URLs based on extensive hardware, software, and network profiling.

The payload dropped on the targets' systems is the NetSupport Client RAT set to run in silent mode, which provides direct access to the compromised machines.

Phishing Microsoft credentials

While the RAT campaign is currently the main operation served by the Parrot TDS, Avast analysts have also noticed several infected servers hosting phishing sites.

Those landing pages resemble a legitimate-looking Microsoft login page asking visitors to enter their account credentials.

	For users who browse the web, having an up-to-date internet security solution running at all times is the best way to deal with malicious redirections.
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HEADLINE	04/07 New ransomware-as-a-service emerges
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/blackcat-purveyor-shows-ransomware-operators-have-nine-lives
GIST	<p>A ransomware group boasting its members come from now-shuttered groups BlackMatter and REvil has emerged from the shadows to launch a new ransomware-as-a-service, already attacking an enterprise resource planning (ERP) service provider and an industrial firm, new research shows.</p> <p>The group, known as ALPHV, and its BlackCat malware have already infected "numerous corporate victims," endpoint security firm Kaspersky said in an initial analysis posted on April 7. The operators of the new group advertise themselves as the strongest option to replace BlackMatter and REvil following international takedowns of those ransomware groups and their infrastructures. Kaspersky researchers have detected signs that at least some of the members likely had roles in a previous group, BlackMatter.</p> <p>The exact division of activities between the new group, its affiliates, and other cybercriminal services is unclear, says Kurt Baumgartner, principal security researcher at Kaspersky.</p> <p>"In all likelihood, the overall set of global BlackCat incidents is performed by a mix of both the group maintaining the code and service, and affiliates performing their own work," he says. "Some of that work can be broken down further, too, into access brokers and penetration efforts performed by the individual groups."</p> <p>The analysis — and the strong hint that at least some of the operators may have been part of BlackMatter — shows that taking down ransomware groups' infrastructure does not stop them from again setting up shop.</p> <p>In the case of ALPHV, Kaspersky researchers discovered that the group used a private tool, dubbed Fendr, that has only been used by BlackMatter in the past. ALPHV used the tool to exfiltrate data from corporate victims in December 2021 and January 2022 before deploying ransomware, in a popular tactic known as double extortion.</p> <p>"Our telemetry suggests that at least some members of the new BlackCat group have links to the BlackMatter group, because they modified and reused a custom exfiltration tool we call Fendr and which has only been observed in BlackMatter activity," Kaspersky stated in the threat brief. "This use of a modified Fendr, also known as ExMatter, represents a new data point connecting BlackCat with past BlackMatter activity."</p> <p>Malware Coders Take a Shine to Rust</p> <p>The group is one of the few that has written their tools in the popular, but still uncommon, programming language Rust, which allows them to quickly compile tools for multiple platforms, Kaspersky stated in its blog post. Rust allows the group to release one version for Windows and Linux, because of cross-compilation, and has significant security checks to reduce the incident of vulnerabilities.</p> <p>"Rust is a cross-compilation language, so a number of BlackCat Linux samples quickly appeared in the wild shortly after their Windows counterparts," the researchers stated in the analysis. Other security firms have seen an increase in Linux malware in the past year.</p> <p>Kaspersky has detected Black Cat activity against a Middle Eastern provider of enterprise resource planning (ERP) services, with the attackers attempting to steal credentials as well as encrypt the drives. A second attack — against an oil, gas, mining, and construction company in South America — included the use of the Fendr exfiltration tool.</p>

	<p>REvil and BlackMatter Redux?</p> <p>Divining the composition of the current group is a complex task, because ALPHAV is a collection of developers, RaaS services, affiliates, negotiators, and cash-out support, says Baumgartner. Could the ALPHAV group just be an affiliate who created their own organization and decide to use the REvil and BlackMatter brands for name recognition?</p> <p>"It's possible, and certainly, 'they' — ALPHAV — claim to be composed of multiple parts of various past ransomware schemes including REvil and BlackMatter, but at the same time, they are completely unreliable sources with bad agendas of their own," he says. "I will say that it's clear for at least a portion of the BlackCat activity, there is a definitive lineage back to BlackMatter activity."</p> <p>While both REvil and BlackMatter have been linked to the Russian actors, Baumgartner could not say whether ALPHV is itself made up of Russian nationals. Previous research has connected both to other groups such as DarkSide and LockBit 2.0.</p> <p>Kaspersky has been the focus of a debate over whether the firm's software could pose a threat to national security. In 2017, Russian cyber-espionage operators stole classified cyberattack and defense tools from the home computer of a National Security Agency contractor by exploiting Kaspersky's security software. The US government has since banned the software, but the issue has resurfaced with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. According to a report in The Wall Street Journal, the Biden administration is debating whether to sanction the firm.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Paying ransom: no guarantee data recovery
SOURCE	https://www.helpnetsecurity.com/2022/04/07/organizations-targeted-by-ransomware/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>OwnBackup announced the findings of a global survey conducted by Enterprise Strategy Group (ESG) that reveals a staggering 79% of respondent organizations have been targeted by ransomware within the past 12 months. Of those organizations, nearly three quarters said the attack was successful, meaning that it disrupted business operations.</p> <p>Other key findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the respondents that said their organization paid a cyber ransom to regain access to data, applications, and/or systems after an attack, only 14% were able to recover all of their data. • 87% of respondents who made ransom payments said that they experienced additional extortion attempts beyond the initial ransomware demand. • 31% of respondent organizations targeted by ransomware indicated that application user and permission misconfigurations were the initial point of compromise. • 87% of respondents are very or somewhat concerned about their backups being infected by ransomware attacks. <p>"While data backups are essential for ensuring business continuity in the event of a successful ransomware attack, their value makes them prime targets of ransomware infection themselves," said Sam Gutmann, CEO of OwnBackup.</p> <p>"By storing backups outside of production on an independent platform, companies can not only keep them safe from a potentially devastating cyberattack, but also avoid having to pay a ransom to get their data back. It's also important to remember that data security is a team sport, and that IT, InfoSec, CISOs and others must work in unison to truly prevent attacks."</p> <p>"This research further reveals the prevalence of ransomware and just how difficult it is for organizations to fully manage the threat," said Christophe Bertrand, Practice Director at ESG.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Website Russia oil giant down; hacked?
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/russian-oil-gazprom-neft-hack/?&web_view=true

GIST	<p>The website of Gazprom Neft, the oil arm of Russian state gas company Gazprom, was offline on Wednesday after an alleged hack, in what appears to be the latest hack on a government-associated site following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>A statement allegedly from Gazprom CEO Alexie Miller, a close friend of President Vladimir Putin, was briefly displayed on the website.</p> <p>The statement appeared to show a hacked version of the site making critical remarks about Russia’s decision to send thousands of troops into Ukraine.</p> <p>The website stopped operating soon afterward.</p> <p>Last month, Miller urged Gazprom’s 500,000 employees to support the Kremlin to keep Russia’s status as a significant power in the face of pressing foreign sanctions.</p> <p>“The information published on the site on the morning of April 6 ... is not true and cannot be regarded as an official statement of the company’s representatives or shareholders,” Gazprom Neft said.</p> <p>Gazprom Neft is Russia’s third-largest oil producer. It is a subsidiary of Gazprom, which holds 96% of its stock. OAO Gazprom owns 95% of Gazprom Neft’s shares, with the remaining listed on the stock exchange.</p> <p>Last month, multiple Ukrainian news websites were allegedly hacked by Russian threat actors, leaving the ‘Z’ symbol on display to visitors. The State Service of Special Communication and Information Protection of Ukraine confirmed the incident in a web post, attributing blame to Russian state-sponsored actors</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Flaw in fintech platform: compromised?
SOURCE	https://threatpost.com/ssrf-flaw-fintech-bank-accounts/179247/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>A server-side request forgery (SSRF) flaw in an API of a large financial technology (fintech) platform potentially could have compromised millions of bank customers, allowing attackers to defraud clients by controlling their bank accounts and funds, researchers have found.</p> <p>A team at Salt Security’s Salt Labs identified the vulnerability in an API in a web page that supports the organization’s platform fund transfer functionality, which allows clients to transfer money from their accounts on its platform into their bank accounts, researchers disclosed in a report published Thursday.</p> <p>The company in question—dubbed “Acme Fintech” to preserve its anonymity—offers a “digital transformation” service for banks of all sizes, allowing the institutions to switch traditional banking services to online services. The platform already has been actively integrated into many banks’ systems and thus has millions of active daily users, researchers said.</p> <p>If the flaw had been exploited, attackers could have performed various nefarious activities by gaining administrative access to the banking system using the platform. From there they could have leaked users’ personal data, accessed banking details and financial transactions, and performed unauthorized fund transfers into their own bank accounts, researchers said.</p> <p>Upon identifying the vulnerability, researchers reviewed their findings and provided recommended mitigation to the organization, they said.</p> <p>High Reward for Threat Actors</p> <p>API flaws are often overlooked, but researchers at Salt Labs said in the report that they “see vulnerabilities like this one and other API-related issues on a daily basis.”</p>

Indeed, 5 percent of organizations experienced an API security incident in the past 12 months, according to the company's [State of API Security](#) report for the first quarter of 2022. This period also showed significant growth of malicious API traffic, they said.

[“Critical SSRF flaws](#) are more common than many FinTech providers and banking institutions realize,” Yaniv Balmas, vice president of research for Salt Security said in a press statement. “API attacks are becoming more frequent and complex.”

Fintech companies are especially vulnerable to compromise because their customers and partners rely on a vast network of APIs to drive interactions between various websites, mobile applications and custom integrations, among other systems, researchers said.

This, in turn, makes them “prime targets by attackers looking to abuse API vulnerabilities” for a couple of reasons, researchers wrote.

“One, their API landscape and overall functionality is very rich and complex, which leaves a lot of room for mistakes or overlooking details in development,” they wrote. “Two, if a bad actor can successfully abuse this type of platform, the potential profits are huge, since it could allow control of millions of users’ bank accounts and funds.”

The Vulnerability

Researchers discovered the flaw while scanning and recording all traffic sent and received across the organization’s website. On a page that connects clients to various banks so they can transfer funds to their bank accounts, researchers discovered an issue with the API the browser calls to handle the request.

“This specific API is using the endpoint located at ‘/workflows/tasks/{TASK_GUID}/values,’ the HTTP method used to call it is

PUT, and the specific request data is sent in the HTTP body section,” researchers explained.

The request body also carries a JWT Bearer token, which is a cryptographically signed key that lets the server know who is the requesting user and what permissions he has.

The flaw was in the request parameters that send the required data for a funds transfer—specifically a parameter called “InstitutionURL,” researchers explained. This is a user-provided value that includes a URL pointing to some GUID value placed on the receiving bank website.

In this case, the bank’s web server handled the user-supplied URL by trying to contact the URL itself, allowing for a SSRF in which the web server still tried to call an arbitrary URL if it was inserted into the code instead of the appropriate bank’s URL, researchers explained.

Exposing the SSRF Flaw

Researchers demonstrated this flaw by forging a malformed request containing their own domain. The connection coming into their server was made successfully, proving that “the server blindly trusts domains provided to it in this parameter and issues a request to that URL,” they wrote.

Further, the request that came into their server included a JWT token used for authentication, which turned out to be a different one than the token included in the original request.

Researchers embedded the new JWT token into a request they’d previously encountered to an endpoint named “/accounts/account,” which had allowed them to retrieve information from a bank account. This time they returned even more information, they said.

“The API endpoint recognized our new JWT administrative token and very gracefully returned a list of every user and its details across the platform,” researchers revealed.

	<p>Trying the request again to an endpoint named “/transactions/transactions” with the new token also allowed them to access a list of all transactions made by every user on the banking system, they said.</p> <p>“This vulnerability is a critical flaw, one that completely compromises every bank user,” researchers said. “Had bad actors discovered this vulnerability, they could have caused serious damage for both [the organization] and its users.”</p> <p>Salt Labs hopes that shining a light on API threats will inspire security practitioners to take a closer look at how their systems may be vulnerable in this way, Balmas said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Bitcoin bust shuttered child abuse website
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/tracers-in-the-dark-welcome-to-video-crypto-anonymity-myth/
GIST	<p>CONTENT WARNING: THE story told here includes references to suicide and child abuse, though the abuse is not graphically described.</p> <p>EARLY ONE FALL morning in 2017, in a middle-class suburb on the outskirts of Atlanta, Chris Janczewski stood alone inside the doorway of a home he had not been invited to enter.</p> <p>Moments earlier, armed Homeland Security Investigations agents in ballistic vests had taken up positions around the tidy two-story brick house, banged on the front door, and when a member of the family living there opened it, swarmed inside. Janczewski, an Internal Revenue Service criminal investigator, followed quietly behind. Now he found himself in the entryway, in the eye of a storm of activity, watching the agents search the premises and seize electronic devices.</p> <p>They separated the family, putting the father, an assistant principal at the local high school and the target of their investigation, in one room; his wife in another; the two kids into a third. An agent switched on a TV and put on <i>Mickey Mouse Clubhouse</i> in an attempt to distract the children from the invasion of their home and the interrogation of their parents.</p> <p>Janczewski had come along on this raid only as an observer, a visitor flown in from Washington, DC, to watch and advise the local Homeland Security team as it executed its warrant. But it had been Janczewski’s investigation that brought the agents here, to this average-looking house with its well-kept yard among all the average-looking houses they could have been searching, anywhere in America. He had led them there based on a strange, nascent form of evidence. Janczewski had followed the links of Bitcoin’s blockchain, pulling on that chain until it connected this ordinary home to an extraordinarily cruel place on the internet—and then connected that place to hundreds more men around the world. All complicit in the same massive network of unspeakable abuse. All now on Janczewski’s long list of targets.</p> <p>Over the previous few years, Janczewski, his partner Tigran Gambaryan, and a small group of investigators at a growing roster of three-letter American agencies had used this newfound technique, tracing a cryptocurrency that once seemed untraceable, to crack one criminal case after another on an unprecedented, epic scale. But those methods had never led them to a case quite like this one, in which the fate of so many people, victims and perpetrators alike, seemed to hang on the findings of this novel form of forensics. That morning’s search in the suburb near Atlanta was the first moment when those stakes became real for Janczewski. It was, as he would later put it, “a proof of concept.”</p> <p>From where Janczewski was positioned at the front of the house, he could hear the Homeland Security agents speaking to the father, who responded in a broken, resigned voice. In another room, he overheard the agents questioning the man’s wife; she was answering that, yes, she’d found certain images on her husband’s computer, but he’d told her he had downloaded them by accident when he was pirating music. And in the third room he could hear the two grade-school-age children—kids about as old as Janczewski’s own—watching TV. They asked for a snack, seemingly oblivious to the tragedy unfolding for their family.</p> <p>Janczewski remembers the gravity of the moment hitting him: This was a high school administrator, a husband and a father of two. Whether he was guilty or innocent, the accusations this team of law</p>

enforcement agents were leveling against him—their mere presence in his home—would almost certainly ruin his life.

Janczewski thought again of the investigative method that had brought them there like a digital divining rod, revealing a hidden layer of illicit connections underlying the visible world. He hoped, not for the last time, that it hadn't led him astray.

ON A SUMMER'S day in London a few months earlier, a South Africa-born tech entrepreneur named Jonathan Levin had walked into the unassuming brick headquarters of the UK's National Crime Agency—Britain's equivalent to the FBI—on the south bank of the Thames. A friendly agent led him to the building's second floor and through the office kitchen, offering him a cup of tea. Levin accepted, as he always did on visits to the NCA, leaving the tea bag in.

The two men sat, cups in hand, at the agent's desk in a collection of cubicles. Levin was there on a routine customer visit, to learn how the agent and his colleagues were using the software built by the company he'd cofounded. That company, [Chainalysis](#), was the world's first tech firm to focus solely on a task that a few years earlier might have sounded like an oxymoron: tracing cryptocurrency. The NCA was one of dozens of law enforcement agencies around the world that had learned to use Chainalysis' software to turn the digital underworld's preferred means of exchange into its Achilles' heel.

When Bitcoin first appeared in 2008, one fundamental promise of the cryptocurrency was that it revealed only which coins reside at which Bitcoin addresses—long, unique strings of letters and numbers—without any identifying information about those coins' owners. This layer of obfuscation created the impression among many early adherents that Bitcoin might be the fully anonymous internet cash long awaited by libertarian cypherpunks and crypto-anarchists: a new financial netherworld where digital briefcases full of unmarked bills could change hands across the globe in an instant.

Satoshi Nakamoto, the mysterious inventor of Bitcoin, had gone so far as to write that “participants can be anonymous” in an [early email](#) describing the cryptocurrency. And thousands of users of dark-web black markets like Silk Road had embraced Bitcoin as their central payment mechanism. But the counterintuitive truth about Bitcoin, the one upon which Chainalysis had built its business, was this: Every Bitcoin payment is captured in its blockchain, a permanent, unchangeable, and entirely *public* record of every transaction in the Bitcoin network. The blockchain ensures that coins can't be forged or spent more than once. But it does so by making everyone in the Bitcoin economy a witness to every transaction. Every criminal payment is, in some sense, a smoking gun in broad daylight.

Within a few years of Bitcoin's arrival, [academic security researchers](#)—and then companies like Chainalysis—began to tear gaping holes in the masks separating Bitcoin users' addresses and their real-world identities. They could follow bitcoins on the blockchain as they moved from address to address until they reached one that could be tied to a known identity. In some cases, an investigator could learn someone's Bitcoin addresses by transacting with them, the way an undercover narcotics agent might conduct a buy-and-bust. In other cases, they could trace a target's coins to an account at a cryptocurrency exchange where financial regulations required users to prove their identity. A quick subpoena to the exchange from one of Chainalysis' customers in law enforcement was then enough to strip away any illusion of Bitcoin's anonymity.

Chainalysis had combined these techniques for de-anonymizing Bitcoin users with methods that allowed it to “cluster” addresses, showing that anywhere from dozens to millions of addresses sometimes belonged to a single person or organization. When coins from two or more addresses were spent in a single transaction, for instance, it revealed that whoever created that “multi-input” transaction must have control of both spender addresses, allowing Chainalysis to lump them into a single identity.

In other cases, Chainalysis and its users could follow a “peel chain”—a process analogous to tracking a single wad of cash as a user repeatedly pulled it out, peeled off a few bills, and put it back in a different pocket. In those peel chains, bitcoins would be moved out of one address as a fraction was paid to a recipient and then the remainder returned to the spender at a “change” address. Distinguishing those

change addresses could allow an investigator to follow a sum of money as it hopped from one address to the next, charting its path through the noise of Bitcoin's blockchain.

Thanks to tricks like these, Bitcoin had turned out to be practically the *opposite* of untraceable: a kind of honeypot for crypto criminals that had, for years, dutifully and unerasably recorded evidence of their dirty deals. By 2017, agencies like the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Agency, and the IRS's Criminal Investigation division (or IRS-CI) had traced Bitcoin transactions to carry out one investigative coup after another, very often with the help of Chainalysis.

The cases had started small and then gained a furious momentum. Investigators had traced the transactions of two corrupt federal agents to show that, before the 2013 takedown of Silk Road, one had stolen bitcoins from that dark-web market and another had sold law enforcement intel to its creator, Ross Ulbricht. Next they tracked down half a billion dollars of bitcoins stolen from the Mt. Gox exchange and showed that the proceeds had been laundered by the Russian administrator of another crypto exchange, BTC-e, eventually locating the exchange's servers in New Jersey. And finally, they followed bitcoin trails to nail down the identity of the founder of AlphaBay, a dark-web market that had grown to 10 times the size of Silk Road. (In fact, even as Levin was sitting in London talking to the NCA agent, a coalition of half a dozen law enforcement agencies was converging in Bangkok to arrest AlphaBay's creator.)

Levin was, as always, on the lookout for Chainalysis' next big investigation. After running through a few open cases with him, the NCA agent mentioned an ominous site on the dark web that had recently come onto the agency's radar. It was called Welcome to Video.

The NCA had stumbled across the site in the midst of a horrific case involving an offender named Matthew Falder. An academic based in Manchester, England, Falder would pose as a female artist and solicit nude photos from strangers on the internet, then threaten to share those images with family or friends unless the victims recorded themselves carrying out increasingly demeaning and depraved acts. Ultimately he'd force his victims to commit self-harm and even sexually abuse others on camera. By the time he was arrested, he had targeted 50 people, at least three of whom had attempted suicide.

On Falder's computers, the NCA had found he was a registered user of Welcome to Video, a criminal enterprise that, by its sheer scale, put even Falder's atrocities in the shade. This evidentiary lead had then wended its way from the NCA's child exploitation investigations team to the computer crime team, including the cryptocurrency-focused agent at whose desk Levin now sat. Welcome to Video, it seemed, was among the rare sites that sold access to clips of child sexual abuse in exchange for bitcoin. It was clear at a glance that its library of images and videos was uncommonly large, and it was being accessed—and frequently refreshed with brand-new material—by a sprawling user base around the globe.

Sometimes known as “child pornography,” the class of imagery that was trafficked on Welcome to Video has increasingly come to be called “child sexual abuse material” by child advocates and law enforcement, so as to strip away any doubt that it involves acts of violence against kids. CSAM, as it is usually abbreviated, had for years represented a massive undercurrent of the dark web, the collection of thousands of websites protected by anonymity software like Tor and I2P. Those anonymity tools, used by millions of people around the world seeking to avoid online surveillance, had also come to serve as the shadow infrastructure for an abhorrent network of abuse, which very often foiled law enforcement's attempts to identify CSAM sites' visitors or administrators.

The NCA agent showed Levin a Bitcoin address that the agency had determined was part of Welcome to Video's financial network. Levin suggested they load it in Chainalysis' crypto-tracing software tool, known as Reactor. He set down his cup of tea, pulled his chair up to the agent's laptop, and began charting out the site's collection of addresses on the Bitcoin blockchain, representing the wallets where Welcome to Video had received payments from thousands of customers.

He was taken aback by what he saw: Many of this child abuse site's users—and, by all appearances, its administrators—had done almost nothing to obscure their cryptocurrency trails. An entire network of criminal payments, all intended to be secret, was laid bare before him.

Over the years, Levin had watched as some dark-web operators wised up to certain of his firm's crypto-tracing tricks. They would push their money through numerous intermediary addresses or "mixer" services designed to throw off investigators, or use the cryptocurrency Monero, designed to be far harder to track. But looking at the Welcome to Video cluster in the NCA office that day, Levin could immediately see that its users were far more naive. Many had simply purchased bitcoins from cryptocurrency exchanges and then sent them directly from their own wallets into Welcome to Video's.

The contents of the website's wallets, in turn, had been liquidated at just a few exchanges—Bithumb and Coinone in South Korea, Huobi in China—where they were converted back into traditional currency. Someone seemed to be continually using large, multi-input transactions to gather up the site's funds and then cash them out. That made it easy work for Reactor to instantly and automatically cluster thousands of addresses, determining that they all belonged to a single service—which Levin could now label in the software as Welcome to Video. What's more, Levin could see that the constellation of exchanges surrounding and connected to that cluster likely held the data necessary to identify a broad swath of the site's anonymous users—not simply who was cashing out bitcoins from the site, but who was buying bitcoins to put into it. The blockchain links between Welcome to Video and its customers were some of the most clearly incriminating connections that Levin had ever witnessed.

These child sexual abuse consumers seemed to be wholly unprepared for the modern state of financial forensics on the blockchain. By the standards of the cat-and-mouse game Levin had played for years, Welcome to Video was like a hapless rodent that had never encountered a predator.

As he sat in front of the NCA agent's laptop, it dawned on Levin, perhaps more clearly than ever before, that he was living in a "golden age" of cryptocurrency tracing—that blockchain investigators like those at Chainalysis had gained a significant lead over those they were targeting. "We've created something extremely powerful, and we're a step ahead of these types of operators," he remembers thinking. "You've got a heinous crime, a terrible thing happening in the world, and in an instant our technology has broken through and revealed in very clear logic who's behind it."

Seeing that someone was cashing out the majority of Welcome to Video's revenues through the two exchanges in South Korea, Levin could already guess that the administrator was very likely located there. Many of the site's users seemed to be paying the site directly from the addresses where they'd purchased the coins, on exchanges like Coinbase and Circle, based in the United States. Taking down this global child abuse network might only require getting another law enforcement agency in either the US or Korea involved, one that could demand identifying details from those exchanges. And Levin had just the agency in mind.

"I have some people who would be interested," he told his NCA host.

But first, as he prepared to leave, Levin silently memorized the first five characters of the Welcome to Video address the agent had shown him. Chainalysis' Reactor software included a feature that could autocomplete Bitcoin addresses based on their first few unique numbers or letters. Five would be enough—a single short password to unlock the living map of a global criminal conspiracy.

IT WAS EVENING in Thailand when Levin spoke with Chris Janczewski and Tigran Gambaryan. That night in early July 2017, the two IRS Criminal Investigation special agents were sitting in Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport, stewing over the frustration of being sidelined from the biggest dark-web market takedown in history.

The IRS, by 2017, had come to possess some of the most adept cryptocurrency tracers in the US government. It was Gambaryan, in fact, who had traced the bitcoins of the two corrupt agents in the Silk Road investigations and then cracked the BTC-e money laundering case. Working with Levin, Gambaryan had even tracked down the AlphaBay server, locating it at a data center in Lithuania.

Yet when Gambaryan and Janczewski had come to Bangkok for the arrest of AlphaBay's administrator, the French-Canadian Alexandre Cazes, they had been largely excluded from the inner circle of DEA and

FBI agents who ran the operation. They hadn't been invited to the scene of Cazes' arrest, or even to the office where other agents and prosecutors watched a video livestream of the takedown.

For Gambaryan and Janczewski, the story was utterly typical. IRS-CI agents did shoe-leather detective work, carried guns, and made arrests, just like their FBI and DEA counterparts. But because of the IRS's dowdy public image, they often found that fellow agents treated them like accountants. "Don't audit me," their peers from other law enforcement branches would joke when they were introduced in meetings. Most IRS-CI agents had heard the line enough times that it warranted an instant eye roll.

At loose ends in Bangkok, Gambaryan and Janczewski spent much of their time idly contemplating what their next case should be, browsing through Chainalysis' blockchain-tracing software Reactor to brainstorm ideas. Dark-web markets like AlphaBay seemed to have been reduced to a shambles by the Thailand operation, and they'd take months or even years to recover. The agents considered taking on a dark-web gambling site. But illegal online casinos hardly seemed worth their attention.

On the day of their departure from Thailand, Gambaryan and Janczewski arrived at the airport only to find that their flight to DC was badly delayed. Stuck in the terminal with hours to kill, they sat half-awake and bored, literally staring at the wall. To pass the hours, Gambaryan decided to try calling Chainalysis' Levin to discuss next cases. When Levin picked up the phone, he had news to share. He'd been looking into a website that didn't fit among the IRS's usual targets but that he hoped they'd be willing to check out: Welcome to Video.

Child sexual exploitation cases had traditionally been the focus of the FBI and Homeland Security Investigations, certainly not the IRS. In part, that was because child sexual abuse images and videos were most often shared without money changing hands, in what investigators described as a "baseball card trading" system—which put them outside the IRS's domain. Welcome to Video was different. It had a money trail, and it seemed to be a very clear one.

Soon after they arrived back in DC, Gambaryan and Janczewski enlisted a technical analyst named Aaron Bice from a contract technology firm called Excygent, with whom they'd investigated the crypto exchange BTC-e. Together, they charted out Welcome to Video in Reactor and saw what Levin had recognized right away: how glaringly it presented itself as a target. Its entire financial anatomy was laid before them, thousands of clustered bitcoin addresses, many with barely concealed pay-ins and cash-outs at exchanges they knew they could squeeze for identifying information. It did indeed look, as Levin said, like "a slam dunk." In short order, Janczewski brought the case to Zia Faruqui, a federal prosecutor, who was instantly sold on the idea of taking on Welcome to Video and formally opened an investigation.

Gambaryan, Janczewski, Bice, and Faruqui made an unlikely team to focus on busting a massive child exploitation network. Janczewski was a tall Midwestern agent with a square jaw, like a hybrid of Sam Rockwell and Chris Evans, who wore horn-rimmed glasses when looking at a computer screen. He'd been recruited to the DC computer crimes team from the IRS office in Indiana after proving his mettle in a grab bag of counterterrorism, drug trafficking, government corruption, and tax evasion cases. Bice was an expert in data analysis and was, as Janczewski described his computer skills, "part robot." Faruqui was a seasoned assistant US attorney with a long history of national security and money laundering prosecutions. He had an almost manic focus and intensity, spoke in a comically rapid patter, and, it seemed to his colleagues, barely slept. And then there was Gambaryan, an agent with buzzed hair and a trim beard who by 2017 had made a name for himself as the IRS's cryptocurrency whisperer and dark-web specialist. Faruqui called him "Bitcoin Jesus."

Yet none of the four had ever worked a child sexual exploitation case. They had no training in handling images and videos of child abuse, whose mere possession, in the hands of normal Americans, represented a felony. They had never even seen these sorts of radioactively disturbing materials, and they had no emotional or psychological preparation for the graphic nature of what they were about to be exposed to.

Still, when the two agents showed Faruqui what they saw in the blockchain, the prosecutor was undeterred by their collective inexperience in the realm of child exploitation. As an attorney who focused on money-

laundering cases, he saw no reason why, with the evidence of criminal payments Janczewski and Gambaryan had handed him, they couldn't approach Welcome to Video as, fundamentally, a financial investigation.

"We're going to treat this case like we would any other," he said. "We are going to investigate this by following the money."

WHEN JANCZEWSKI AND Gambaryan first copied the unwieldy web address, mt3plrzdiiyqf6jim.onion, into their Tor browsers, they were greeted by a bare-bones site with only the words "Welcome to video" and a login prompt, a minimalism Janczewski compared to the Google homepage. They each registered a username and password and entered.

Past that first greeting page, the site displayed a vast, seemingly endless collection of video titles and thumbnails, arrayed in squares of four stills per video, apparently chosen automatically from the files' frames. Those small images were a catalog of horrors: scene after scene of children being sexually abused and raped.

The agents had steeled themselves to see these images, but they were still unprepared for the reality. Janczewski remembers the blank shock he felt at the parade of thumbnails alone, the way his brain almost refused to accept what it was seeing. He found that the site had a search page with the misspelled words "Serach videos" written at the top of it. Below the search field, it listed popular keywords users had entered. The most popular was an abbreviation for "one-year-old." The second most popular was an abbreviation for "two-year-old."

Janczewski at first thought he must have misunderstood. He had expected to see recordings of the sexual abuse of young teenagers, or perhaps preteens. But as he scrolled, he found, with mounting revulsion and sadness, that the site was heavily populated with videos of abuse of toddlers and even infants.

"This is a thing, really? No," Janczewski says, numbly recounting his reactions as he first browsed the site. "Oh, there's this many videos on here? No. This can't be real."

The two agents knew that, at some point, they would have to actually watch at least some of the advertised videos. But, mercifully, on their first visits to the site they couldn't access them; to do so, they'd have to pay bitcoins to an address the site provided to each registered user, where they could purchase "points" that could then be traded for downloads. And since they weren't undercover agents, they didn't have the authorization to buy those points—nor were they particularly eager to.

At the bottom of several pages of the site was a copyright date: March 13, 2015. Welcome to Video had already been online for more than two years. Even at a glance, it was clear that it had grown into one of the biggest repositories of child sexual abuse videos that law enforcement had ever encountered.

As Janczewski and Gambaryan analyzed the site's mechanics, they saw that users could obtain points not just by purchasing them but also by uploading videos. The more those videos were subsequently downloaded by other users, the more points they would earn. "Do not upload adult porn," the upload page instructed, the last two words highlighted in red for emphasis. The page also warned that uploaded videos would be checked for uniqueness; only new material would be accepted—a feature that, to the agents, seemed expressly designed to encourage more abuse of children.

The element of the site that Gambaryan found most unnerving of all, though, was a chat page, where users could post comments and reactions. It was filled with posts in all languages, offering a hint at the international reach of the site's network. Much of the discussion struck Gambaryan as chillingly banal—the kind of casual commentary one might find on an ordinary YouTube channel.

Gambaryan had hunted criminals of all stripes for years now, from small-time fraudsters to corrupt federal law enforcement colleagues to cybercriminal kingpins. He usually felt he could fundamentally understand his targets. Sometimes, he'd even felt sympathy for them. "I've known drug dealers who are probably

better human beings than some white-collar tax evaders,” he mused. “I could relate to some of these criminals. Their motivation is just greed.”

But now he’d entered a world where people were committing atrocities that he didn’t understand, driven by motivations that were entirely inaccessible to him. After a childhood in war-torn Armenia and post-Soviet Russia and a career delving into the criminal underworld, he considered himself to be familiar with the worst that people were capable of. Now he felt he had been naive: His first look at Welcome to Video exposed and destroyed a hidden remnant of his idealism about humanity. “It killed a little bit of me,” Gambaryan says.

AS SOON AS they had seen firsthand what Welcome to Video truly represented, Gambaryan and Janczewski understood that the case warranted an urgency that went beyond that of even a normal dark-web investigation. Every day the site spent online, it enabled more child abuse.

Gambaryan and Janczewski knew their best leads still lay in the blockchain. Crucially, the site didn’t seem to have any mechanism for its customers to pull money out of their accounts. There was only an address to which they could pay for credits on the site; there didn’t even seem to be a moderator to ask for a refund. That meant that all the money they could see flowing out of the site—more than \$300,000 worth of bitcoins at the time of the transactions—would almost certainly belong to the site’s administrators.

Gambaryan began reaching out to his contacts in the Bitcoin community, looking for staff at exchanges who might know executives at the two Korean exchanges, Bithumb and Coinone, into which most of Welcome to Video’s money had been cashed out, as well as one US exchange that had received a small fraction of the funds. He found that the mere mention of child exploitation seemed to evaporate the cryptocurrency industry’s usual resistance to government intervention. “As libertarian as you want to be,” Gambaryan says, “this is where everybody kind of drew the line.” Even before he sent a formal legal request or subpoena, staff at all three exchanges were ready to help. They promised to get him account details for the addresses he had pulled from Reactor as soon as they could.

In the meantime, Gambaryan continued to investigate the Welcome to Video site itself. After registering an account on the site, he thought to try a certain basic check of its security—a long shot, he figured, but it wouldn’t cost anything. He right-clicked on the page and chose “View page source” from the resulting menu. This would give him a look at the site’s raw HTML before it was rendered by the Tor Browser into a graphical web page. Looking at a massive block of code, anyway, certainly beat staring at an infinite scroll of abject human depravity.

He spotted what he was looking for almost instantly: an IP address. In fact, to Gambaryan’s surprise, every thumbnail image on the site seemed to display, within the site’s HTML, the IP address of the server where it was physically hosted: 121.185.153.64. He copied those 11 digits into his computer’s command line and ran a basic traceroute function, following its path across the internet back to the location of that server.

Incredibly, the results showed that this computer wasn’t obscured by Tor’s anonymizing network at all; Gambaryan was looking at the actual, unprotected address of a Welcome to Video server. Confirming Levin’s initial hunch, the site was hosted on a residential connection of an internet service provider in South Korea, outside of Seoul.

Welcome to Video’s administrator seemed to have made a rookie mistake. The site itself was hosted on Tor, but the thumbnail images it assembled on its home-page appeared to be pulled from the same computer without routing the connection through Tor, perhaps in a misguided attempt to make the page load faster.

Gambaryan couldn’t help it: Sitting in front of his computer screen in his DC cubicle, staring at the revealed location of a website administrator whose arrest he could feel drawing closer, the agent started to laugh.

JANCZEWSKI WAS AT a firing range in Maryland, waiting his turn in a marksmanship exercise, when he got an email from the American cryptocurrency exchange his team had subpoenaed. It contained identifying information on the suspected Welcome to Video administrator who had cashed out the site's earnings there.

The email's attachments showed a middle-aged Korean man with an address outside of Seoul—exactly corroborating the IP address Gambaryan had found. The documents even included a photo of the man holding up his ID, apparently to prove his identity to the American exchange.

For a moment, Janczewski felt as though he were looking at Welcome to Video's administrator face-to-face. But he remembers thinking that something was off: The man in the picture had noticeably dirty hands, with soil under his fingernails. He looked more like a farm worker than the hands-on-keyboard type he'd expected to be running a site on the dark web.

Over the next days, as the other exchanges fulfilled their subpoenas, the answer began to come into focus. One Korean exchange and then the other sent Gambaryan documents on the men who controlled Welcome to Video's cash-out addresses. They named not just that one middle-aged man but also a much younger male, 21 years old, named Son Jong-woo. The two men listed the same address and shared the same family name. Were they father and son?

The agents believed they were closing in on the site's administrators. But they had come to understand that merely taking down the site or arresting its admins would hardly serve the interests of justice. The constellation of Bitcoin addresses that Welcome to Video had generated on the blockchain laid out a vast, bustling nexus of both consumers and—far more importantly—producers of child sexual abuse materials.

By this point, Faruqui had brought on a team of other prosecutors to help, including Lindsay Suttenger, an assistant US attorney with expertise in child exploitation cases. She pointed out that even taking the site offline shouldn't necessarily be their first priority. "You cannot let a child be raped while you go and try to take down a server in South Korea," as Faruqui summed up her argument.

The team began to realize that, as simple as this "slam dunk" case had seemed at first, after the easy identification of the site's admins, it was actually overwhelming in its complexity. They would need to follow the money not to just one or two web administrators in Korea, but also from that central point to hundreds of potential suspects—both active abusers and their complicit audience of enablers—around the entire globe.

Gambaryan's right-click discovery of the site's IP address and the quick cooperation from crypto exchanges had been lucky breaks. The real work still lay ahead.

JUST TWO WEEKS after Levin passed along his tip, the team of IRS-CI agents and prosecutors knew almost exactly where Welcome to Video was hosted. But they also knew they'd need help to go further. They had neither connections to the Korean National Police Agency—which had a reputation for formality and impenetrable bureaucracy—nor the resources to arrest what could be hundreds of the site's users, an operation that would require far more personnel than the IRS could muster.

Faruqui suggested they bring Homeland Security Investigations in on the case, partnering with a certain field office across the country, in Colorado Springs. He'd chosen that agency and its far-flung outpost because of a specific agent there whom he'd worked with in the past, an investigator named Thomas Tamsi. Faruqui and Tamsi had together unraveled a North Korean arms trading operation a year earlier, one that had sought to smuggle weapon components through South Korea and China. In the course of that investigation, they'd flown to Seoul to meet with the Korean National Police, where, after some introductions by an HSI liaison there, they spent an evening with Korean officers drinking and singing karaoke.

At a particularly memorable point in the night, the Korean agents had been ribbing the US team for their alleged hot-dog-and-hamburger diets. One agent mentioned *sannakji*, a kind of small octopus that some Koreans eat not merely raw but alive and writhing. Tamsi had gamely responded that he'd try it.

A few minutes later, a couple of the Korean agents had brought to the table a fist-sized, living octopus wrapped around a chopstick. Tamsi put the entire squirming cephalopod in his mouth, chewed, and swallowed, even as its tentacles wriggled between his lips and black ink dripped from his face onto the table. "It was absolutely horrible," Tamsi says.

The Koreans found this hilarious. Tamsi gained near-legendary status within certain circles of the Korean National Police, where he was thereafter referred to as "Octopus Guy."

Like most of their group, Tamsi had no experience in child exploitation cases. He had never even worked on a cryptocurrency investigation. But Faruqi insisted that to make inroads in Korea, they needed Octopus Guy.

NOT LONG AFTERWARD, Tamsi and a fellow HSI agent authorized for undercover operations flew to Washington, DC. They rented a conference room in a hotel, and as Janczewski watched, the undercover agent logged on to Welcome to Video, paid a sum of bitcoins, and began downloading gigabytes of videos.

The strange choice of location—a hotel rather than a government office—was designed to better mask the agent's identity, in case Welcome to Video could somehow track its users despite Tor's protection, and also so that, when it came time to prosecute, the DC attorney's office would be given jurisdiction. (The HSI agent did, at least, use a Wi-Fi hot spot for his downloading, to avoid siphoning the web's most toxic content over the hotel's network.)

As soon as the undercover agent's work was complete, they shared the files with Janczewski, who, along with Lindsay Suttenger, would spend the following weeks watching the videos, cataloging any clues they could find to the identities of the people involved while also saturating their minds with enough images of child abuse to fill anyone's nightmares for the rest of their lives.

Suttenger's years as a child exploitation prosecutor had left her somewhat desensitized; she would find that other attorneys on the team couldn't stand to even hear her describe the contents of the videos, much less watch them. "They would ask me to stop talking, to put it in writing," she remembers, "and then they'd tell me that was even worse."

Janczewski, as lead agent on the case, was tasked with putting together an affidavit that would be used in whatever charging document they might eventually bring to court. That meant watching dozens of videos, looking for ones that would represent the most egregious material on the site, and then writing technical descriptions of them for a jury or judge. He compares the experience to a scene from *A Clockwork Orange*: an unending montage from which he constantly wanted to avert his gaze but was required not to.

He says watching those videos altered him, though in ways he could only describe in the abstract—ways even he's not sure he fully understands. "There's no going back," Janczewski says, vaguely. "Once you know what you know, you can't unknow it. And everything that you see in the future comes in through that prism of what you now know."

IN THE FIRST weeks of fall 2017, the team investigating the Welcome to Video network began the painstaking process of tracing every possible user of the site on the blockchain and sending out hundreds of legal requests to exchanges around the world. To help analyze every tendril of Welcome to Video's cluster of Bitcoin addresses in Reactor, they brought on a Chainalysis staffer named Aron Akbiyikian, an Armenian-American former police officer from Fresno whom Gambaryan knew from childhood and had recommended to Levin.

Akbiyikian's job was to perform what he called a "cluster audit"—squeezing every possible investigative clue out of the site's cryptocurrency trails. That meant manually tracing payments back from one prior address to another, until he found the exchange where a Welcome to Video customer had bought their bitcoins—and the identifying information that the exchange likely possessed. Plenty of Welcome to Video's users had made his job easy. "It was a beautiful clustering in Reactor," Akbiyikian says. "It was just so clear." In some cases, he would trace back chains of payments through several hops before the money arrived at an exchange. But for hundreds of users, he says, he could see wallet addresses receive money from exchanges and then put the funds directly into Welcome to Video's cluster, transactions that had created, as Akbiyikian put it, "leads as clean as you could want."

As responses from exchanges with those users' identity information began to pour in, the team started the process of assembling more complete profiles of their targets. They began to collect the names, faces, and photos of hundreds of men—they were almost all men—from all walks of life, everywhere in the world. Their descriptions crossed boundaries of race, age, class, and nationality. All these individuals seemed to have in common was their gender and their financial connection to a worldwide, hidden haven of child abuse.

By this time, the team felt they'd pinned down the site's Korean administrator with confidence. They'd gotten a search warrant for Son Jong-woo's Gmail accounts and many of his exchange records, and they could see that he alone seemed to be receiving the cashed-out proceeds from the site—not his father, who increasingly seemed to the investigators like an unwitting participant, a man whose son had hijacked his identity to create crypto-currency accounts. In Son Jong-woo's emails, they found photos of the younger man for the first time—selfies he'd taken to show friends where he'd chipped a tooth in a car accident, for instance. He was a thin, unremarkable-looking young Korean man with wide-set eyes and a Beatles-esque mop-top of black hair.

But as their portrait of this administrator took shape, so too did the profiles of the hundreds of other men who had used the site.* A few immediately stuck out to the investigative team: One suspect, to the dismay of Thomas Tamsi and his Homeland Security colleagues, was an HSI agent in Texas. Another, they saw with a different sort of dread, was the assistant principal of a high school in Georgia. The school administrator had posted videos of himself on social media singing duets, karaoke-style, with teenage girls from his school. The videos might otherwise have been seen as innocent. But given what they knew about the man's Bitcoin payments, agents who had more experience with child exploitation warned Janczewski that they might reflect a form of grooming.

These were men in privileged positions of power, with potential access to victims. The investigators could immediately see that, as they suspected, they would need to arrest some of Welcome to Video's users as quickly as possible, even before they could arrange the takedown of the site. Child exploitation experts had cautioned them that some offenders had systems in place to warn others if law enforcement had arrested or compromised them—code words or dead man's switches that sent out alerts if they were absent from their computer for a certain period of time. Still, the Welcome to Video investigation team felt they had little choice but to move quickly and take that risk.

Another suspect, around the same time, came onto their radar for a different reason: He lived in Washington, DC. The man's home, in fact, was just down the street from the US attorneys' office, near the capital's Gallery Place neighborhood. He happened to live in the very same apartment building that one of the prosecutors had only recently moved out of.

That location, they realized, might be useful to them. Janczewski and Gambaryan could easily search the man's home and his computers as a test case. If that proved the man was a Welcome to Video customer, they would be able to charge the entire case in DC's judicial district, overcoming a key legal hurdle.

As they dug deeper, though, they found that the man was a former congressional staffer and held a high-level job at a prestigious environmental organization. Would arresting or searching the home of a target with that sort of profile cause him to make a public outcry, sinking their case?

Just as they trained their sights on this suspect in their midst, however, they found that he had gone strangely quiet on social media. Someone on the team had the idea to pull his travel records. They found that he had flown to the Philippines and was about to fly back to DC via Detroit.

This discovery led the agents and prosecutors to two thoughts: First, the Philippines was a notorious destination for sex tourism, often of the kind that preyed on children—the HSI office in Manila constantly had its hands full with child exploitation cases. Second, when the man flew back to the US, Customs and Border Protection could legally detain him and demand access to his devices to search for evidence—a bizarre and controversial carve-out in Americans’ constitutional protections that, in this case, might come in handy.

Would their DC-based suspect sound the alarm and tear the lid off their investigation, just as it was getting started?

“Yes, this all had the potential to blow up our case,” Janczewski says. “But we had to act.”

IN LATE OCTOBER, Customs and Border Protection at the Detroit Metropolitan Airport stopped a man disembarking from a plane from the Philippines on his way back to Washington, DC, asking him to step aside and taking him into a secondary screening room. Despite his vehement protests, the border agents insisted on taking his computer and phone before allowing him to leave.

A few days later, on October 25, the prosecutor who had lived in the same DC apartment block as the suspect saw an email from her old building’s management; she’d remained on the distribution list despite having moved out. The email noted that the parking garage ramp in an alley at the back of the tower would be closed that morning. An unnamed resident, it explained, had landed there after jumping to their death from the balcony of their apartment.

The prosecutor put two and two together. The jumper was their Welcome to Video “test case.” Janczewski and Gambaryan immediately drove to the apartment tower and confirmed with management: The very first target of their investigation had just killed himself.

Later that day the two IRS-CI agents returned to the scene of the man’s death with a search warrant. They rode the elevator up to the 11th floor with the building’s manager, who was deeply puzzled as to why the IRS was involved, but wordlessly unlocked the door for them. Inside they found an upscale, moderately messy apartment with high ceilings. There were suitcases still not fully unpacked from a trip. The man had ordered a pizza the night before, and part of it remained uneaten on the table.

Janczewski remembers feeling the somber stillness of the man’s empty home as he imagined the desperate choice he had faced the night before. Looking down 11 floors from the balcony, the agent could see the spot in the alleyway below where the pavement had recently been hosed off.

DC’s metropolitan police offered to show the agents a security cam video of the man falling to his death. They politely declined. The Customs and Border Protection office in Detroit, meanwhile, confirmed that they had searched the computer seized from the man at the airport—some of its storage was encrypted, but other parts were not—and found child exploitation videos, along with surreptitiously recorded videos of adult sex. Their decision to target the man had served its purpose: Their test case had come back positive.

The prosecutors in DC paused their work briefly to meet and acknowledge the surreal shock of the man’s death—their investigation of a site hosted halfway around the world had already led someone to kill themselves, just blocks away. “It was just a reminder of how serious what we were investigating was,” Faruqi says. Still, the group agreed: They couldn’t let the suicide distract them from their work.

“We’ve got to focus on the victims here,” Faruqi remembers them telling each other. “That provides clarity.”

Janczewski says he would have much preferred that the man be arrested and charged. But he had, by this point, been forced to watch hour after hour of child sexual abuse videos. He had put aside his emotions early on in the case, and he had few sympathies to spare for an apparent customer of those materials.

If he felt anything, he admits, it was relief, given the time that the suicide had saved him: They still had hundreds more Welcome to Video customers to pursue.

NEXT ON THEIR list was the high school assistant principal. Just days later, Janczewski flew down to Georgia and joined a tactical team of HSI agents as they carried out their search. For the first time, he came face-to-face with an alleged Welcome to Video client in his own home.

In spite of his stoicism, this second test case affected Janczewski more than the DC target had. The tidy, well-kept brick two-story house. The parents questioned in separate rooms. The kids the same age as Janczewski's own, watching *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*. As he stood in the entryway of that house outside of Atlanta, the full toll of the investigation hit him—the fact that every name on their list was a person with human connections and, in many cases, a family. That even accusing suspects of such an unforgivable crime had an irreversible impact on their lives—that it was “a scarlet letter for someone that just cannot be undone,” as he put it.

Janczewski and the HSI agents stayed at the home long enough to search it, to question the man, and to seize his devices for analysis. In addition to the evidence of the man's payments for material on Welcome to Video, Faruqi says that the man also admitted to “inappropriately touching” students at his school. The man would later be charged with sexual assault of minors—though he would plead not guilty.

For Janczewski, at least, any last doubts he had felt after his first confrontation with a suspect based on cryptocurrency tracing alone were dispelled in a matter of hours. “At the end of the day, I felt more confident,” he says. “We were correct.” The blockchain had not lied.

THE TEAM WAS steadily working their way through their short list of high-priority Welcome to Video targets and test cases. But in December 2017, they came upon a different sort of lead—one that would scramble their priorities yet again.

As they followed Welcome to Video's financial trails, investigators had been careful to record the full contents of the site's chat page, where users were still posting a steady stream of comments against a backdrop of spam and trolling typical of any anonymous web forum. The site seemed to be entirely unmoderated: There was not so much as an admin email or help contact visible anywhere. But Janczewski began to notice repeated messages from one account that seemed to offer the closest thing the site had to that missing help-desk contact: “Contact the admins,” the messages read, “if you want assistance in fixing error.” It included an address on Torbox, a privacy-focused Tor-based email service.

Was this an actual moderator on the site? Or even the administrator himself—the owner of the site, who they now believed to be Son Jong-woo?

As Janczewski tried to decipher who was behind those messages, he checked the username before the “@” in the Torbox address, a unique-looking string of six characters, to see if it matched a user on Welcome to Video. Sure enough, he found that someone with that same handle had uploaded more than a hundred videos.

Excygent's Aaron Bice had the idea to run this Torbox email address against a database seized from BTC-e during IRS-CI's probe of the crypto exchange, to search for clues in its treasure trove of criminal underworld user data. Bice found a match: One account on BTC-e had been registered with an email address that included that same unique string of six characters. It wasn't the Torbox email address, but one from a different privacy-focused email service called Sigaint.

Janczewski knew that Torbox and Sigaint, both dark-web services themselves, wouldn't respond to legal requests for their users' information. But the BTC-e data included IP addresses for 10 past logins on the exchange by the same user. In nine out of 10, the IP address was obscured with a VPN or Tor. But in one

single visit to BTC-e, the user had slipped up: They had left their actual home IP address exposed. “That opened the whole door,” says Janczewski.

A traceroute showed that the IP address led to a residential internet connection—not in Korea this time, but in Texas. Was there a second Welcome to Video admin, this one based in the US? Janczewski and Bice continued pulling the thread with increasing urgency, subpoenaing the user’s account information from their internet service provider.

It was a Friday morning in early December, and Janczewski was drinking coffee at his desk in the IRS-CI office when he got back the results of that subpoena. He opened the email to find a name and a home address. The man was an American in his thirties who lived in a town outside of San Antonio—an unlikely collaborator for a 21-year-old Korean managing a child exploitation site from 15 time zones away. But the man’s employment, when Janczewski looked it up, was even more jarring: He was another Department of Homeland Security staffer—this time a Border Patrol agent.

Janczewski quickly began to assemble public information about the agent from his social media accounts. He first found a Facebook page for the man’s wife, and later an account for the man himself, with his name written backwards to obscure it. Bice dug up his Amazon page, too, where he seemed to have left reviews on hundreds of products and put others on a “wish list”—including external storage devices that could hold terabytes of videos, hidden cameras, and other cameras designed to be snaked through small spaces, like holes drilled in a wall.

Finally, with a creeping sense of dread, Janczewski saw that the Border Patrol agent’s wife had a young daughter—and that he had created a crowdfunding page on GoFundMe to raise money to legally adopt the girl as his stepdaughter. “*Fuck*,” Janczewski thought to himself. “Did he upload videos of the daughter?”

Janczewski looked back at Welcome to Video and saw that some of the thumbnails of the videos uploaded by the person with this username showed the sexual assault of a young girl about the daughter’s age. He realized he now had a duty to separate this Border Patrol agent from his victim as swiftly as possible.

For the next 10 days, Janczewski barely left his desk. He’d drive home, eat dinner quickly with his family in their small Arlington, Virginia, townhouse, then drive back to the office to work late, often calling Bice and Faruqi well into the night.

“You are rarely in a situation where your time is zero-sum,” Faruqi says. “Every moment we were not working on that case, a little girl could be getting raped.”

Janczewski asked their undercover HSI agent to download the videos that had been uploaded by the Texas agent, and he began the grueling process of watching them one by one. A few videos in, he spotted something that jolted the pattern-matching subroutines of his brain: At one point in the recording, the girl in the video had a red flannel shirt tied around her waist. He looked back at a photo of the girl posted to the GoFundMe page and saw it: She was wearing the same red flannel.

Was this Border Patrol agent an admin on Welcome to Video? A moderator? It hardly mattered. Janczewski now believed he had found the identity of an active child rapist who lived with his victim and had been recording and sharing his crimes with thousands of other users. The Texas man had earned a place at the very top of their target list.

TWO WEEKS BEFORE Christmas, on the 10th day after he’d identified the Border Patrol agent, Janczewski flew to southern Texas, along with HSI’s Thomas Tamsi and his team’s child-exploitation-focused prosecutor, Lindsay Suttenger. On a cool, dry evening about a hundred miles from the Mexican border, Tamsi and a group of Texas State Police officers tailed their target as he drove home from work and pulled him over. Together with a group of FBI agents, they took the man to a nearby hotel for questioning.

Meanwhile Janczewski and a group of local Homeland Security investigators entered the man's house and began to search for evidence. The two-story home was run-down and messy, Janczewski remembers—with the exception of the man's well-organized home office on the second floor, where they found his computer. Down the hall from that office he came to the girl's bedroom and immediately recognized it as the scene where the videos uploaded by the man had been filmed. On the wall he noticed a poster he'd seen in the recordings and momentarily felt as though he'd fallen through the screen of his own computer into the set of a horror film.

The IRS agent and prosecutor had brought with them an FBI interviewer with child exploitation experience, who separated the girl from the agents searching her home and took her to a safer location. The girl eventually detailed to the interviewer the abuse she'd endured.

Shortly after the search of the Border Patrol agent's home, Janczewski arrived at the hotel room where other agents were questioning their suspect. He saw, for the first time, the target of his last week-and-a-half's obsession. The man was tall and burly, still in his uniform, with thinning hair. He initially refused to talk about any physical abuse he might have committed, Janczewski says, but he eventually confessed to possessing, sharing, and—finally—making child sexual abuse videos.

Janczewski was struck by the dispassionate, almost clinical way the man described his actions. He gave his interrogators the password to his home computer, and an agent still at the house began pulling evidence from the machine and sending it to Janczewski. It included detailed spreadsheets of every child sexual exploitation video the man had both amassed on his hard drives and, by all appearances, filmed in his own home.

Another spreadsheet from the man's computer contained a long list of other Welcome to Video users' login credentials. Under questioning, the man explained his scheme: He would pose as an administrator in messages he posted to the site's chat page, then ask users who took the bait to send him their usernames and passwords, which he'd use to log in to their accounts and access their videos.

The Border Patrol agent had never been a Welcome to Video administrator or moderator at all, only a particularly devious visitor to the site, willing to scam his fellow users to support his own appetites.

After an intense 10 days, they'd identified and arrested another alleged child abuser, even rescued his victim. But as he flew back to DC, Janczewski knew that Welcome to Video's vastly larger network of abuse remained very much intact. And until they took the site itself down, it would continue to serve its videos—including the very ones the Border Patrol agent had uploaded from his Texas home office—to an anonymous throng of consumers just like him.

IN EARLY JANUARY of 2018, the DC investigators got word from Thomas Tamsi that he and the team had arrested the other federal law enforcement customer of Welcome to Video, the HSI agent who'd shown up early in their blockchain tracing and subpoenas. Though seemingly unconnected to the Border Patrol agent case, this second agent had been based in Texas, too, less than an hour away from the home of the man they had just raided.

Aside from that grim coincidence, the news of the HSI agent's arrest also meant that the DC team's initial list of high-priority suspects was finally checked off. They could move on to their primary target, Son Jong-woo—and the Welcome to Video server under his control.

By February, that Korea-focused operation was coming together. Before the Texas arrests, Janczewski, Gambaryan, Faruqui, and Tamsi had flown to Seoul to meet the Korean National Police Agency. At a dinner set up by the local HSI attaché, the director of the KNPA himself told Tamsi—whose octopus-eating reputation preceded him—that the Americans would have the help of his “best team.” Soon they had Son Jong-woo under constant surveillance as he came and went from his home, an apartment two and a half hours south of Seoul in the province of South Chungcheong.

Now, in the depths of winter on the Korean peninsula, just a week after Korea had hosted the Olympics in Pyeongchang, the American agents arrived in Seoul again. Gambaryan had to stay behind for a badly timed conference where the agency's director had volunteered him to speak. But Janczewski and Faruqui brought with them Aaron Bice and Youli Lee, a Korean-American computer crime prosecutor on their team. By this point, too, a growing international force had assembled around the case. The UK's National Crime Agency, which had launched its own investigation into Welcome to Video just after Levin's London visit, sent two agents to Seoul, and the German Federal Police also joined the coalition. It turned out the Germans had been pursuing the site's administrators independently, even before they'd learned about the IRS's investigation, but they'd never been able to secure the cooperation of the Korean National Police.

At one point Faruqui remembers a German official asking him, as they stood in the cold outside the Seoul hotel where they were staying, how the Americans had gotten the Koreans on board so quickly. "Oh, Octopus Guy," Faruqui had explained. "You don't have Octopus Guy. We have Octopus Guy."

FOR THEIR FIRST days in Seoul, the takedown team met repeatedly in the Korean National Police offices to talk through their plans. Their tracing of the IP address, based on Gambaryan's fortuitous right-click, seemed to show that the site's server was located, bizarrely, not in any web-hosting firm's data center but in Son Jong-woo's own apartment—the evidentiary hub of a massive child sexual abuse video network, sitting right in his home. That made things simple: They would arrest him, tear his site offline, and use that evidence to convict him. The team made a plan to grab him in his apartment early on a Monday morning.

Then, on the Friday before, Janczewski got a cold. He spent much of the weekend with prosecutor Youli Lee, dazedly wandering between markets and stores in Seoul trying to pronounce *gaseubgi*, the Korean word for humidifier. On Sunday evening, he took a dose of what he hoped was a Korean equivalent of Nyquil—he couldn't read the label—with the intention of getting some sleep and recovering in time to be at full strength for the arrest.

That's when the KNPA alerted the team that the plan had changed: Son had unexpectedly driven into Seoul for the weekend. Now the team following his whereabouts believed he had begun a late-night drive back to his home south of the city.

If the police could drive down to Son's home that night and stake it out, perhaps they could be there when he returned, ready to arrest him at his door. That way he couldn't destroy evidence or—another looming concern after the death of their Washington, DC, target—commit suicide. "We had to scramble," Janczewski says.

That evening, Faruqui insisted the group put their hands in for a "Go team!" cheer in their hotel lobby. Then he and Lee went up to their rooms to go to bed. Janczewski—sick, half asleep from cold medication, and clutching a pillow from his hotel room—walked out into the pouring rain and got in a car with the HSI liaison to start the long night-drive south. The HSI agent had begged Janczewski to take the wheel of another car in the caravan, instead of an elderly Korean man on his team who was, the agent said, a notoriously bad driver. But Janczewski insisted he was far too medicated to navigate the dark, wet highways of a country 7,000 miles from his home.

A few hours later, the team arrived in the parking lot of Son's apartment—a 10-story tower with a few small buildings on one side and a vast, empty rural landscape on the other—to begin their long stakeout in the rain. It was well past midnight when they saw Son's car finally pull into the parking garage of the complex.

A group of Korean agents had been waiting there for him. One particularly imposing officer, whom the HSI agents referred to as "Smiley"—because he never smiled—led a team of plainclothes police, sidling into the elevator next to Son as he got inside. The agents silently rode the elevator up to Son's floor with him and stepped out when he did. They arrested him, without resistance, just as he reached his front door.

There were more than 250,000 videos on the server—more content by volume than in any child sexual abuse materials case in history.

Throughout that arrest and the hours-long search of Son's apartment that followed, Janczewski and the other foreigners remained stuck in their cars in the rain-drenched parking lot. Only the National Police had authorization to lay hands on Son or enter his home. When the Korean officers had the young Welcome to Video admin handcuffed, they asked him if he'd consent to letting Janczewski or any of the Americans come in as well. Son, unsurprisingly, said no. So Janczewski was limited to a tour via FaceTime of the small and unremarkable apartment that Son shared with his divorced father, the man with the soiled hands in the first photo they'd examined, as the Korean agents scoured it for evidence and seized his devices.

The Korean agent showing Janczewski around eventually pointed the phone's camera at a desktop computer on the floor of Son's bedroom, a cheap-looking tower-style PC with its case open on one side. The computer's guts revealed the hard drives that Son seemed to have added, one by one, as each drive had filled up with terabytes of child exploitation videos.

This was the Welcome to Video server.

"I was expecting some kind of glowing, ominous thing," Janczewski remembers, "and it was just this dumpy computer. It was just so strange. This dumpy computer, that had caused so much havoc around the world, was sitting on this kid's floor."

ON THE RETURN trip, Janczewski learned exactly why the HSI liaison had wanted him to drive the other car. The elderly HSI staffer behind the wheel of the other vehicle in their caravan was somehow so disoriented after a sleepless night that he turned the wrong way down a highway exit ramp, narrowly avoiding a high-speed collision and terrifying his passenger, Aaron Bice.

After barely averting that disaster, as the sun began to rise and the rain let up, the group pulled over at a truck stop along the highway to have a breakfast of gas-station instant ramen. Janczewski, still sick and utterly exhausted, was struck by how anticlimactic it all seemed. His team had located and extricated both the administrator and the machine at the epicenter of the malevolent global network they were investigating. He had been anticipating this moment for more than six months. But he felt no elation. There were no high fives, no celebrations. The agents got back in their cars to continue the long drive back to Seoul.

THE NEXT DAY, after finally getting some sleep, Janczewski began to see past the dreariness of the previous night's operation to understand just how lucky they had been. He learned from the forensic analysts who had examined Son Jong-woo's computers that Son hadn't encrypted his server. Everything was there: all of Welcome to Video's content, its user database, and the wallets that had handled all of its Bitcoin transactions.

The scale of the video collection, now that they could see it in its entirety, was staggering. There were more than 250,000 videos on the server, more content by volume than in any child sexual abuse materials case in history. When they later shared the collection with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), which helps to catalog, identify, and take down CSAM materials across the internet, NCMEC found that it had never seen 45 percent of the videos before. Welcome to Video's uniqueness check and incentive system for fresh content appeared to have served its purpose, motivating countless new cases of recorded child abuse.

The real prize for the investigators, however, was the site's user information. The Korean National Police gave the US team a copy of Welcome to Video's databases, and they got to work in a US Embassy building in Seoul, reconstructing those data collections on their own machine. Meanwhile, to avoid tipping off the site's users to the takedown, they quickly set up a look-alike Welcome to Video homepage on their own server, using the private key pulled from the real server to take over its dark-web address. When users visited the site, it now displayed only a message that it was under construction and would be back soon with "upgrades," complete with typos to mimic Son's shoddy English spelling.

Bice spent two days with his head down, rebuilding the site's user data in a form they could easily query—with Janczewski and Faruqi standing behind him, pestering him to see if the system was ready yet. When Bice was finished, the US team had a full directory of the site's pseudonymous users, listed by their Welcome to Video usernames. They could now link every Bitcoin payment they had initially mapped out on the blockchain with those usernames and look up exactly what content each of those users had uploaded or downloaded.

By the time the Americans were ready to go home at the end of February, they had integrated the de-anonymized identities from their cryptocurrency exchange subpoenas into a searchable database. It mapped out the entire Welcome to Video network, complete with users' real-world names, photos, and—for those who had paid into the site—the record of those payments and the exact child abuse videos those customers had bought access to. "You could see the whole picture," Janczewski says. "It was like a dictionary, thesaurus, and Wikipedia all put together."

They had, arrayed before them, the fully revealed structure of Welcome to Video's global child exploitation ring—hundreds of exquisitely detailed profiles of consumers, collectors, sharers, producers, and hands-on abusers alike. Now the final phase of the case could begin.

OVER THE WEEKS that followed, Thomas Tamsi's team in Colorado began sending their Welcome to Video dossiers to HSI agents, local police, and foreign police agencies around the world. These "targeting packages" included descriptions of the suspects, the record of their transactions, any other evidence they'd assembled about them, and—given that they were being sent out to law enforcement agents who had in some cases never been involved in a cryptocurrency-related investigation—short primers on how Bitcoin and its blockchain worked.

There would be no coordinated, global takedown, no attempt to create shock and awe with simultaneous arrests. The case's defendants were far too distributed and international for that kind of synchronized operation. Instead, searches, arrests, and interviews began to roll out across the globe—prioritized by those they'd learned might be active abusers, then uploaders, and finally downloaders. Slowly, as Welcome to Video's users were confronted, one by one, the DC team began to hear back about the results of their work—with harrowing, sometimes gratifying, often tragic outcomes.

If not for cryptocurrency, and the years-long trap set by its purported untraceability, most of the 337 pedophiles arrested in the case—and their rescued victims—likely never would have been found. A Kansas IT worker—whose arrest they'd prioritized when they found that his wife ran an at-home daycare for infants and toddlers—had deleted all of his child abuse videos from his computer before the agents arrived. Prosecutors say he later confessed when remnants of the files in the computer's storage matched their records from the Welcome to Video server.

When the agents came for a twentysomething man in New York, his father blocked the door of their apartment, thinking at first that it was a break-in. But when agents explained what their warrant was for, he turned on his son and let them in. The son, it later turned out, had sexually assaulted the daughter of a family friend and surreptitiously recorded another young girl through her webcam, according to prosecutors.

A repeat offender in Washington, DC, tried to commit suicide when the HSI team entered his home; he hid in his bathroom and slit his own throat. One of the arresting agents happened to have training as an Army medic. He managed to slow the bleeding and keep the man alive. They later found 450,000 hours of child abuse videos on his computers—including recordings of the girl in Texas that had been uploaded by the Border Patrol agent.

As months passed, the stories continued to pile up, a mix of the sordid, sad, and appalling. An elderly man in his seventies who had uploaded more than 80 child abuse videos. A man in his early twenties with traumatic brain damage, whose medication had heightened his sexual appetites and reduced his impulse control, and who was deemed to have the same level of cognitive development as the preteens whose

abuse he'd watched. A New Jersey man whose communications, when they were revealed through a search warrant, seemed to show his negotiations to purchase a child for his own sexual exploitation.

Thomas Tamsi, as the lead HSI agent on the case, coordinated more Welcome to Video arrests than anyone else—more than 50, by his count—and was present for enough of them that they became a blur in which only the most jarring moments remain distinct in his mind. The mostly nude defendant he found in a basement. The suspect who told him he had been involved in the Boy Scouts and that “children had always been attracted” to him. Parents of victims who vehemently denied that a family friend could have done the things Tamsi described, and whose faces then went white as he slid printouts of redacted screenshots across the table.

The cases spanned the globe, well beyond the US. Dozens of Welcome to Video users were arrested in the Czech Republic, Spain, Brazil, Ireland, France, and Canada. In England, where the entire case had started with an agent's tip to Levin, the country's National Crime Agency arrested one 26-year-old who had allegedly abused two children—one of whom they found naked on a bed in his home—and uploaded more than 6,000 files to the site. In another international case, a Hungarian ambassador to Peru who downloaded content from Welcome to Video was found to have more than 19,000 CSAM images on his computer. He was quietly removed from his South American post, taken to Hungary, and charged; he pleaded guilty.

For the DC team, many of the international cases fell into a kind of black hole: One Saudi Arabian Welcome to Video user returned to his home country and was captured by that country's own law enforcement. Faruqui and Janzewski say they never heard what happened to the man; he was left to the Saudis' own justice system, which sentences some sex criminals to the Sharia-based punishments of whipping or even beheading. When agents searched the car of a Chinese national living near Seattle with a job at Amazon, they found a teddy bear, along with a map of playgrounds in the area, despite the man having no children of his own. The man subsequently fled to China and, as far as prosecutors know, was never located again.

In each of the hundreds of intelligence packets that the team sent out, Chris Janczewski's contact was listed as the number to call with any questions. Janczewski found himself explaining the blockchain and its central role in the case again and again, to HSI agents and local police officers around the US and the world, many of whom had never even heard of Bitcoin or the dark web. “You get this lead sent to you that says, ‘Here's this website and this funny internet money,’” Janczewski says, imagining how those on the receiving end of the intelligence packets must have seen it, “and now you need to go arrest this guy because some nerd accountant says so.”

In total, Janczewski traveled to six countries and spoke to more than 50 different people to help explain the case, often multiple times each—including one US prosecutor and agent team with whom he had more than 20 conversations. (“Some were a little more high maintenance, respectfully, than others,” he says.) Bice, who oversaw the reconstructed server data, says he spoke to even more agents and officers—well over a hundred, by his count.

Ultimately, from the beginning of the case through the year and a half that followed the server seizure, global law enforcement would arrest no fewer than 337 people for their involvement with Welcome to Video. They also removed 23 children from sexually exploitative situations.

Those 337 arrests still represented only a small fraction of Welcome to Video's total registered users. When the US team examined their copy of the server data in Korea, they had found thousands of accounts on the site. But the vast majority of them had never paid any bitcoins into the site's wallets. With no money to follow, the investigators' trail usually went cold.

If not for cryptocurrency, in other words, and the years-long trap set by its purported untraceability, the majority of the 337 pedophiles arrested in the Welcome to Video case—and their rescued victims—likely never would have been found.

THE IRS AND the US attorneys' office in DC had taken an unprecedented approach, treating a massive child sexual abuse materials case as a financial investigation, and it had succeeded. Amidst all their detective work, it had been Bitcoin's blockchain that served as their true lodestar, leading them through a landmark case. Without crypto tracing, Faruqui argues, they would never have managed to map out and identify so many of the site's users.

"That was the only path through this darkness," he says. "The darker the darknet gets, the way that you shine the light is following the money."

Throwing money-laundering investigators into the deep end of the internet's CSAM cesspool, however, had taken its toll. Almost every member of the team had children of their own, and almost all of them say they became far more protective of those children as a result of their work, to the degree that their trust in the people around their family has been significantly damaged.

Janczewski, who after the case moved from DC to Grand Rapids, Michigan, won't let his children ride their bikes to school on their own, as he himself did as a child. Even seemingly innocent interactions—like another friendly parent who offers to watch his kids at the other end of a swimming pool—now trigger red alerts in his mind. Youli Lee says she won't allow her 9- and 12-year-old children to go into public bathrooms by themselves. Nor will she allow them to play at a friend's house unless the friend's parents have top-secret security clearances—an admittedly arbitrary rule, but one she says ensures the parents have at least had a background check.

Faruqui says the 15 or so videos he watched as part of the investigation remain "indelibly seared" into his brain and have permanently heightened his sense of the dangers the world presents to his children. He and his wife argue, he says, about his overprotective tendencies. "You always see the worst of humanity, and so you've lost perspective," he quotes his wife telling him. "And I say, '*You* lack perspective, because you don't know what's out there.'"

Gambaryan's wife Yuki says the Welcome to Video case was the only time her hard-shelled, Soviet-born husband ever discussed a case with her and confessed that it had gotten to him—that he was struggling with it emotionally. Gambaryan says that it was, in particular, the sheer breadth of the cross-section of society that participated in the site's abuse that still haunts him.

"I saw that everybody's capable of this: doctors, principals, law enforcement," he reflected. "Whatever you want to call it, evil, or whatever it is: It's in everybody—or it can be in anybody."

IN EARLY JULY of 2020, Son Jong-woo walked out of a Seoul penitentiary wearing a black long-sleeve T-shirt and carrying a green plastic bag of his belongings. He had spent, due to Korea's lenient laws on child sexual abuse, just 18 months in prison.

US prosecutors, including Faruqui, had argued that he should be extradited to the United States to face charges in the American justice system, but Korea had denied their request. Welcome to Video's convicted creator and administrator was free.

The DC-based team that worked the Welcome to Video case remains deeply dissatisfied with Son's mystifyingly light sentence for running, by some measures, the biggest child sexual abuse materials website in history. But Janczewski says he's comforted by the outcry in Korean society over the case. The country's social media exploded in anger over Son's quick release. More than 400,000 people signed a petition to prevent the judge in the case from being considered for a seat on the country's supreme court. One Korean lawmaker put forward a bill to allow appeals to extradition judgments, and the country's National Assembly introduced new legislation to strengthen punishments for sexual abuse online and downloading child sexual abuse materials.

In the US, meanwhile, the ripple effects of the case continued for years. Janczewski, Bice, and Suttenger say that they still get calls from law enforcement officials following the leads they assembled. On the computer of the DC investigators' very first test case—the former congressional staffer who committed

suicide—they found evidence in a cryptocurrency exchange account that he’d also paid into a different source of dark-web sexual materials. They followed those payments to a site called Dark Scandals, which turned out to be a smaller but equally disturbing dark-web repository of sexual abuse recordings.

Janczewski, Gambaryan, and the same group of prosecutors pursued that Dark Scandals case in parallel with the tail end of the Welcome to Video investigation,

similarly following blockchain leads to trace the site’s cash-outs. With the help of the Dutch national police, they arrested the site’s alleged administrator in the Netherlands, a man named Michael Rahim Mohammad, who went by the online handle “Mr. Dark.” He faces criminal charges in the US, and his case is ongoing.

From the perspective of Welcome to Video’s money-laundering-focused agents and prosecutors, perhaps the most interesting of the ripple effects of the case stemmed from the fate of the HSI agent they had arrested in Texas, just before their trip to carry out the site takedown in Korea. The Texan man had taken a rare approach to his legal defense: He’d pleaded guilty to possession of child sexual abuse materials, but he also appealed his conviction. He argued that his case should be thrown out because IRS agents had identified him by tracking his Bitcoin payments—without a warrant—which he claimed violated his Fourth Amendment right to privacy and represented an unconstitutional “search.”

A panel of appellate judges considered the argument—and rejected it. In a nine-page opinion, they explained their ruling, setting down a precedent that spelled out in glaring terms exactly how far from private they determined Bitcoin’s transactions to be.

“Every Bitcoin user has access to the public Bitcoin blockchain and can see every Bitcoin address and its respective transfers. Due to this publicity, it is possible to determine the identities of Bitcoin address owners by analyzing the blockchain,” the ruling read. “There is no intrusion into a constitutionally protected area because there is no constitutional privacy interest in the information on the blockchain.”

A search only requires a warrant, the American judicial system has long held, if that search enters into a domain where the defendant has a “reasonable expectation of privacy.” The judges’ ruling argued that no such expectation should have existed here: The HSI agent wasn’t caught in the Welcome to Video dragnet because IRS agents had violated his privacy. He was caught, the judges concluded, because he had mistakenly believed his Bitcoin transactions to have ever been private in the first place.

Levin thought again of the blockchain’s bounty of evidence: the countless cases left to crack, the millions of cryptocurrency transactions eternally preserved in amber, and the golden age of criminal forensics it presented to any investigator ready to excavate them.

CHRIS JANCZEWSKI SAYS the full impact of the Welcome to Video case didn’t hit him until the day in October 2019 when it was [finally announced](#) in public and a seizure notice was posted to the site’s home-page. That morning, Janczewski received an unexpected call from the IRS commissioner himself, Charles Rettig.

Rettig told Janczewski that the case was “this generation’s Al Capone”—perhaps the highest compliment that can be bestowed within IRS-CI, where the story of Capone’s takedown for tax evasion holds almost mythical status.

That same day, the Justice Department held a press conference to announce the investigation’s results. US attorney Jessie Liu gave a speech to a crowd of reporters about what the case represented—how following the money had allowed agents to score a victory against “one of the worst forms of evil imaginable.”

Chainalysis’ Jonathan Levin sat in the audience. Afterward, an IRS official named Greg Monahan, who had supervised Gambaryan and Janczewski, came over to thank Levin for his role in the case. It had all started, after all, with Levin’s tip to two bored IRS agents in the Bangkok airport. Monahan told Levin that

	<p>it was the most important investigation of his career, that he could now retire knowing he had worked on something truly worthwhile.</p> <p>Levin shook the IRS-CI supervisor's hand. Neither he nor Monahan could know, at that time, of the cases still to come: that IRS-CI and Chainalysis would together go on to disrupt North Korean hackers, terrorism financing campaigns, and two of the largest bitcoin-laundering services in the world. Or that they would track down close to 70,000 bitcoins stolen from the Silk Road and another 120,000 stolen from the exchange Bitfinex, totaling to a value of more than \$7.5 billion at today's exchange rates, the largest financial seizures—crypto or otherwise—in the Department of Justice's history.</p> <p>But as he answered Monahan, Levin thought again of the blockchain's bounty of evidence: the countless cases left to crack, the millions of cryptocurrency transactions eternally preserved in amber, and the golden age of criminal forensics it presented to any investigator ready to excavate them.</p> <p>"There's so much more to do," Levin said. "We're just getting started."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 FIN7 hacker jailed 5yrs; stole \$1B in losses
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/ukrainian-hacker-sentenced-in-seattle-to-5-years-in-prison
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — A Ukrainian man who served as a high-level hacker in a ring that stole more than 20 million credit and debit card records, causing an estimated \$1 billion in losses, has been sentenced to five years in prison.</p> <p>Denys Iarmak, 32, is the third member of the hacking group FIN7 to be sentenced in the U.S.</p> <p>He was arrested in Bangkok in November 2019 at the request of federal investigators.</p> <p>FIN7 breached the computer networks and point-of-sale terminals of thousands of businesses in all 50 states.</p> <p>Investigators say Iarmak was involved from approximately November 2016 through November 2018.</p> <p>He used project management software to coordinate FIN7 hacking efforts.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 India: foiled China cyberattack
SOURCE	https://www.thedefensepost.com/2022/04/08/india-chinese-cyber-attack/
GIST	<p>India on Thursday claimed it foiled an attempted cyber-attack by Chinese hackers targeting its power distribution system near a disputed frontier where the two countries are engaged in a military stand-off.</p> <p>Ties between the world's two most populous nations are at a low ebb after a deadly skirmish in the Himalayan region of Ladakh that left at least 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers dead in 2020.</p> <p>"Two attempts by Chinese hackers were made to target electricity distribution centers near Ladakh but were not successful," power minister R.K. Singh told reporters in New Delhi.</p> <p>Singh added that India had deployed "defense systems" to counter such attacks.</p> <p>New Delhi's claim came a day after US-based intelligence firm Recorded Future said suspected Chinese hackers had made at least seven attempts to target Indian power infrastructure in recent months.</p> <p>The attacks targeted infrastructure "responsible for carrying out real-time operations for grid control and electricity dispatch", the group reported.</p>

	<p>“This targeting has been geographically concentrated... in north India, in proximity to the disputed India-China border in Ladakh.”</p> <p>Recorded Future said it had alerted Indian officials before publishing the report but did not specify the scale of the alleged attacks, nor whether they were successful.</p> <p>China’s foreign affairs ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian denied China had targeted Indian infrastructure with cyber-attacks.</p> <p>“We firmly oppose and combat all forms of hacking in accordance with the law,” Zhao said in Beijing during a Thursday press briefing.</p> <p>“We will never support, encourage or condone such activities.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Multiple apps secret data harvesting code
SOURCE	https://gizmodo.com/google-play-store-bans-apps-after-finding-data-stealing-1848759136
GIST	<p>Google recently booted over a dozen apps from its Play Store—among them Muslim prayer apps with 10 million-plus downloads, a barcode scanner, and a clock—after researchers discovered secret data-harvesting code hidden within them. Creepier still, the clandestine code was engineered by a company linked to a Virginia defense contractor, which paid developers to incorporate its code into their apps to pilfer users’ data.</p> <p>While conducting research, researchers came upon a piece of code that had been implanted in multiple apps that was being used to siphon off personal identifiers and other data from devices. The code, a software development kit, or SDK, could “without a doubt be described as malware,” one researcher said.</p> <p>For the most part, the apps in question appear to have served basic, repetitive functions—the sort that a person might download and then promptly forget about. However, once implanted onto the user’s phone, the SDK-laced programs harvested important data points about the device and its users like phone numbers and email addresses, researchers revealed.</p> <p>The Wall Street Journal originally reported that the weird, invasive code, was discovered by a pair of researchers, Serge Egelman, and Joel Reardon, both of whom co-founded an organization called AppCensus, which audits mobile apps for user privacy and security. In a blog post on their findings, Reardon writes that AppCensus initially reached out to Google about their findings in October of 2021. However, the apps ultimately weren’t expunged from the Play store until March 25 after Google had investigated, the Journal reports. Google issued a statement in response: “All apps on Google Play must comply with our policies, regardless of the developer. When we determine an app violates these policies, we take appropriate action.”</p> <p>One of the apps was a QR and barcode scanner that, if downloaded, was instructed by the SDK to collect a user’s phone number, email address, IMEI information, GPS data, and router SSID. Another was a suite of Muslim prayer apps including Al Moazin and Qibla Compass—downloaded approximately 10 million times—that similarly pilfered phone numbers, router information, and IMEI. A weather and clock widget with over one million downloads sucked up a similar amount of data at the code’s command. In all, the apps, some of which could also determine users’ locations, had racked up more than 60 million downloads.</p> <p>“A database mapping someone’s actual email and phone number to their precise GPS location history is particularly frightening, as it could easily be used to run a service to look up a person’s location history just by knowing their phone number or email, which could be used to target journalists, dissidents, or political rivals,” writes Reardon in his blog post.</p>

	<p>So who is behind all this? According to researchers, a company registered in Panama called Measurement Systems. The researchers write in their report that Measurement Systems was actually registered by a company called Vostrom Holdings—a firm based in Virginia with ties the national defense industry. Vostrom contracts with the federal government via a subsidiary firm called Packet Forensics, which appears to specialize in cyberintelligence and network defense for federal agencies, the Journal reports.</p> <p>App developers who spoke to the newspaper claimed that Management Systems had paid them to implant its SDK into their apps, which allowed the company to “surreptitiously collect data” from device users. Other developers noted that the company asked them to sign non-disclosure agreements. Documents viewed by the Journal apparently revealed that the company mostly wanted data on users who were based in “Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe and Asia.”</p> <p>The defense industry has a long, problematic relationship with the data brokerage industry—something that data researchers on Twitter were quick to point out after the Journal’s story dropped....</p> <p>A full list of the apps that were found to contain the creepy SDK code can be found in Reardon’s write-up at the AppCensus website.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/06 Vevo probes YouTube pages hack
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/vevo-announces-investigation-after-youtube-accounts-for-rihanna-justin-beiber-taylor-swift-kanye-and-more-hacked/
GIST	<p>Multinational video hosting service Vevo said it will be investigating a recent incident where someone took over the YouTube pages for several high-profile artists and either uploaded music videos or changed the names of popular videos.</p> <p>“Some videos were directly uploaded to a small number of Vevo artist channels earlier today by an unauthorized source. All of those improperly uploaded videos have since been deleted by Vevo. No pre-existing content was accessible to the source,” a Vevo spokesperson told The Record.</p> <p>“While the artist channels have been secured and the incident has been resolved, as a best practice Vevo will be conducting a review of our security systems.”</p> <p>Vevo did not respond to questions about how someone was able to take over multiple accounts from different artists. The company is best known for providing music videos to YouTube for some of the world’s biggest artists.</p> <p>But earlier this week, several YouTube users took to Twitter to say they were getting alerts from their favorite artists about new videos. When opened, the videos were of other artists, including a popular gamer and musician going by the name IShowSpeed.</p> <p>Some of the videos’ titles even included “hacked by @LOSPELAOSBRO.”</p> <p>The pages hacked included those owned by Kanye West, Justin Bieber, Drake, Eminem, Michael Jackson, Taylor Swift, Ariana Grande, Harry Styles, Travis Scott, The Weeknd and Lil Nas X.</p> <p>The affected channels have hundreds of millions of subscribers. Representatives for all of the artists did not respond to requests for comment. A spokesperson for Universal Music Group, which represents several of the artists affected, directed The Record to Vevo for comment.</p> <p>YouTube parent company Google and IShowSpeed, the artist who had some of his music posted to the hacked YouTube pages, also did not respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>‘Free Paco Sanz’</p>

The Twitter handle “[@LOSPELAOSBRO](#)” has tweeted profusely since the attacks began on April 5. The handle’s biography section says, “Official account of the criminal group Los Pelaos.”

The group’s first tweet says they “hacked Travis Scott” and several of their subsequent tweets reference Paco Sanz, a man from Spain [who is in prison](#) for pretending to have a terminal illness in 2017.

According to [Business Insider](#), the security guard became famous in Spain after several musicians donated to his treatment, and private investigators subsequently exposed him as a fraud.

He was sentenced to two years in prison after [stealing more than €350,000](#), according to El Mundo.

“We will not stop until the political prisoner Paco Sanz is released,” the group [said in one Tweet](#). The videos uploaded to the pages of Justin Bieber, Travis Scott, Juice Wrld, Kanye West, Drake and others were titled “Justin bieber – Free Paco Sanz (ft. Will Smith, Chris Rock, Skinny flex & Los Pelaos).”

The group began to ask Twitter users for suggestions on who to hack next, eventually taking over the pages for artists like Playboi Carti, Lil Nas X, Daddy Yankee and others. The videos uploaded to those accounts included titles like “HACKED BY @LOSPELAOSBRO” or “No Doubt – no me retiro era broma @lospelaosbro.”

The group proceeded to tweet out its subsequent hacks, which ranged from Cardi B to Rihanna and J Balvin. From there, the group said it was “going big,” moving to targets like Ariana Grande, Migos and others.

Several other charged claims were tweeted out by the group. They threatened to attack more YouTube accounts but tweeted, “We do not attack governments, only private companies.”

All of the videos have been deleted but the Twitter account currently has more than 15,000 followers. In October, Google’s Threat Analysis Group [said it disrupted](#) several financially motivated phishing campaigns targeting YouTubers with Cookie Theft malware.

Vevo has become a popular service for artists but noted on its website that it does not provide access directly to artists, instead giving control of pages to “Content Providers” or music labels.

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	04/06 Unrepentant: 20yr-sentence; try to join ISIS
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/man-sentenced-to-20-years-for-trying-to-join-isis-testified-he-would-again-seek-to-join-isis-if-acquitted/
GIST	<p>A California man was sentenced today to 20 years in prison for attempting to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, aka ISIS.</p> <p>Bernard Raymond Augustine, 25, of Keyes, was convicted by a federal jury after a one-week trial in August 2021.</p> <p>According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, in February 2016, Augustine traveled from San Francisco to Northern Africa with the goal of joining ISIS. After arriving in Tunisia, Augustine was detained by local authorities before he could make it to ISIS-controlled territory across the border in Libya. He was returned to the United States in 2018 and prosecuted in the Eastern District of New York.</p> <p>In the months leading up to his travel, Augustine watched ISIS propaganda, including videos glorifying ISIS’s violence, such as “The Flames of War.” He conducted internet searches for, among other things, “how to safely join ISIS,” and reviewed websites related to ISIS recruitment practices, including one</p>

	<p>titled, “How does a Westerner join ISIS? Is there a recruitment or application process?” Augustine also posted numerous statements in support of ISIS and violent extremism, such as “the Islamic State is the true Islam,” “Muslims who leave the west . . . answer the call for the struggle, and march until they are victorious or martyred are the true believers,” and the ISIS caliphate “can’t be established and maintained except through the blood of the mujahideen who practice the true belief.”</p> <p>The defendant represented himself at trial and testified that he maintained his interest in supporting ISIS. Augustine testified that ISIS videos of members executing Syrian captives and beheadings were “good” and “really cool.” He admitted that one way he intended to provide material support to ISIS was to participate in ISIS propaganda videos by providing the necessary English-language voice over. When asked to confirm his testimony that he “would do it all again and would go back today,” Augustine responded, “No, tomorrow, when they let me off.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Terror attack in Tel Aviv: 2 killed, 9 shot
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/people-shot-attack-terror-attack-tel-aviv-israel/story?id=83940895
GIST	<p>Two people were shot dead and several others were injured in a terror attack in Tel Aviv, Israel, on Thursday night, according to authorities.</p> <p>At least 9 people were shot in the attack, with victims being taken to Ichilov, Sheba Tel Hashomer and Wolfson hospitals, according to Magen David Adom, Israel's national emergency medical service. Two men, "approximately 30 years old," were pronounced dead at Ichilov Hospital.</p> <p>Three people in serious condition -- a 20-year-old man, 28-year-old woman and 38-year-old man -- were being treated for serious injuries, according to the medical service. Four others were being treated for mild injuries.</p> <p>Several other people at the scene were being treated for "stress symptoms," according to Magen David Adom.</p> <p>The alleged suspect was killed in a shootout with authorities, the Israel Foreign Ministry said in a statement.</p> <p>"The Palestinian terrorist that carried out the shooting attack in Tel-Aviv last night was killed in a shootout with security forces near a mosque in Jaffa," the Israel Foreign Ministry tweeted.</p> <p>Officials said "several" shootings took place at Dizengoff Street, Gordon Street and surrounding areas in Tel Aviv. Dizengoff Street is a major street that runs through Tel Aviv and has many shops, bars and restaurants and would have been bustling with activity on a Thursday night.</p> <p>"It has been a very difficult night," Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett wrote on Twitter. "I send my condolences to the families of those who were murdered, and I pray for the complete recovery of the wounded. Security forces are in pursuit of the terrorist who carried out the murderous rampage tonight in Tel Aviv. Wherever the terrorist is – we will get to him. And everyone who helped him indirectly or directly -- will pay a price."</p> <p>The attack Thursday is one of several recent terror attacks in Israel. There were three fatal terror attacks at the end of March. On March 30, five people were shot to death in Bnei Brak, east of Tel Aviv, by a man on a motorcycle who was later killed by police. One of the victims was a police officer, according to Magen David Adom.</p> <p>Two days earlier, on March 28, two police officers were shot to death and four others were wounded in an attack. Then, a week prior, four people were killed in a stabbing attack in the southern Israeli city of Beersheba. The suspect was shot dead.</p> <p>The Islamic State has claimed responsibility for most of the attacks.</p>

HEADLINE	04/07 Congo: military camp bar explosion; 8 dead
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/dead-explosion-military-camp-bar-eastern-congo-83944107
GIST	<p>GOMA, Congo -- An explosion at a military camp bar on the outskirts of eastern Congo's largest city killed at least eight people Thursday night, a government spokesman said.</p> <p>The victims had gathered for drinks in the Katindo military camp around 7:40 p.m., Patrick Muyaya said on his Twitter account.</p> <p>Witnesses at the scene told The Associated Press that a grenade caused the explosion, but there was no immediate official confirmation of the accounts.</p> <p>The military camp is about 5 kilometers (3 miles) from the center of Goma, a city near the Rwandan border that is home to a large U.N. peacekeeping mission presence.</p> <p>"Teams are already on site to investigate," Muyaya tweeted. "We call on the population to remain calm."</p> <p>The rare explosion in Goma comes amid mounting violence in eastern Congo, some of which has been blamed on militants with shadowy links to Islamic extremist organizations. Those fighters have deliberately targeted the Congolese military as soldiers have stepped up counterinsurgency operations.</p> <p>Bars serving alcohol also have come under increasing attack, including a suicide bombing at a nightclub in the town of Beni on Christmas Day that killed six people. An Islamic State-affiliated group later claimed responsibility for those killings.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 Tel Aviv manhunt, shooting; terrorist dead
SOURCE	https://www.ipost.com/breaking-news/article-703568
GIST	<p>The terrorist who killed two people and wounded twelve more in Tel Aviv's Dizengoff Street was killed in an exchange of fire with Israeli forces early on Friday morning.</p> <p>Dizengoff Terrorist identified</p> <p>Identified as 28-year-old Ra'ad Fathi Hazem from the Jenin refugee camp, he was located hiding near a mosque in Jaffa by two Shin Bet officers who identified a suspicious figure who was similar to the suspect. According to a report by Walla! News, Zaydan pulled out his gun and fired 10 bullets toward the officers who returned fire and killed him.</p> <p>Walla! Reported that it's believed that Hazzam knew the area and that he hoped to hide in the mosque during the first Friday prayers of Ramadan.</p> <p>The Shin Bet said that he had no known organizational affiliation, previous arrests or security background. Palestinian reports said that his father is a senior officer with the Palestinian Authority security forces and that he had uncles who were affiliated with Fatah and were killed in clashes with security forces.</p> <p>The agency said that Hazzam had entered Israel illegally and that it is being investigated if he had received any support.</p> <p>Manhunt in Tel Aviv</p> <p>The manhunt for Hazzam spanned over nine hours, with at least 1,000 police and IDF reinforcements combing the area for the gunman. Forces, including units from the IDF's Sayeret Matkal, Lotar and the Israel Air Force's elite Shaldag unit, went building by building in central Tel Aviv looking for him.</p> <p>Police had urged residents to stay inside and away from windows and balconies while they searched for him.</p>

"After a difficult night, and after long hours of joint activity by the Israel Police, the Shin Bet and the IDF, we succeeded this morning, in operational and intelligence cooperation, in closing a circle and eliminating the terrorist by exchange of fire," said Israel Police Chief Kobi Shabtai Friday morning. "We emphasized that no matter how much it takes, we will catch the terrorist, alive or dead, and indeed the contact this morning was a quick and determined response from the Shin Bet and YAMAM fighters in Jaffa."

Attack on bars and restaurants

The attack took place at two locations on Dizengoff Street which is one of the city's busiest streets on Thursday nights with restaurants and bars along the street full of people. After opening fire toward Ilka Bar, the shooter ran down a side street and opened fire again.

According to Israeli media reports, he shot some 10 bullets.

Koby Brinn, a bartender at the Spicehaus bar, said he saw the chaos unfold outside the bar. "It was nuts. I was at the bar that faced outside, and suddenly there was this massive wave of people running in the street."

Victims of terrorism

Tel Aviv's Ichilov Medical Center said that it's continuing to treat eight people who were wounded in the attack, including a man who remains in critical condition with "immediate danger to his life." Another two people, a man and a woman, also remain in critical condition. Two others remain in moderate condition and another four are lightly wounded.

One of the victims was identified as 28-year-old old Tomer Morad, who worked at Ilka Bar and was originally from Kfar Saba.

Raised security alert

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, Defense Minister Benny Gantz, IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Aviv Kohavi were at the Kirya receiving updates throughout the search for the terrorist. Public Security Minister Omer Bar Lev, Israel Police chief Kobi Shabtai and IDF Deputy Chief of Staff Herzl Halevi were on the scene.

Bennett expressed his condolences to the families of the victims and wished the wounded a speedy recovery on Thursday night. He warned that those that aided the terrorist would pay a price.

"I share the grief of the families of the murdered, wish recovery to the wounded and express appreciation to the forces that have acted and continue to act around the clock," Defense Minister Benny Gantz said on Friday morning.

Palestinian factions welcomed the terrorist attack on Thursday, with videos of celebrations in the West Bank, Gaza and Lebanon shared by Palestinian media. Hamas called the attack a "natural and legitimate response to the escalation of the occupation's crimes against our people, our land, Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Mosque."

Shabtai said that Israel Police would continue with a high level of security following the attack, "including securing the first Friday prayers of Ramadan."

The police chief warned that they would "respond with great force and intensity to any unusual event, as we responded immediately after the attack in Tel Aviv, and we will pursue anyone who harms or seeks to harm Israeli citizens. "

"We will expand our operations against the wave of terrorism in attack, defense and intelligence," Gantz said. "We will continue to operate wherever necessary."

Ongoing terrorism wave

Security forces have been placed on high alert in response to the rise in terrorist attacks in Israel and gunfire targeting IDF troops in the West Bank. Some 1,000 soldiers in special forces training have been sent to help the Israel Police within Israel's borders and major cities.

Hundreds of IDF troops were deployed along the Seam Line in an effort to stop tens of thousands of Palestinians who enter the country on a daily basis through breaches in the security fence. The IDF also reinforced troops with 14 combat battalions – 12 to the West Bank and two to the Gaza Division.

The attack was the latest in a series of deadly attacks that began last month in Beersheba, Hadera and Bnei Brak. So far, 13 people have been killed in the attacks.

The last shooting attack on Dizengoff Street was in 2016 when two people were killed and several others were wounded when an Israeli-Arab opened fire on the Simta bar, just a few blocks away from the Ilka bar. The attacker, Nashat Melhem, took a taxi to escape the scene and later shot and killed the driver. Melhem was killed a few days later by security forces.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	04/07 Seattle rape cases moved to backburner?
SOURCE	https://www.kuow.org/stories/seattle-rape-cases-moved-to-backburner-police-insiders-say
GIST	<p>Investigating sex crimes has become much less of a priority in Seattle.</p> <p>In the last year, Seattle Police have forwarded far fewer sex assault cases to the King County Prosecutor's Office. Meanwhile, arrests for sex crimes involving adults and children have plummeted: This year so far, 1.6% of cases investigated by the sexual assault and child abuse unit have resulted in an arrest, down from 14% in 2019.</p> <p>This impacts adult victims most often; two employees of Seattle Police confirmed that adult sex assault cases are seldom assigned — a recent development.</p> <p>In March, outside of arrests, not a single sexual assault case involving an adult victim was assigned to a detective, according to documentation provided by a Seattle Police employee.</p> <p>The Seattle Police Department says there are fewer officers to investigate these crimes. The two anonymous Seattle Police employees agreed that employee retention is part of the problem; 16% of Seattle officers are on leave. Others have left permanently. But it's not the only reason, they say.</p> <p>A new mayor means a new policing strategy, and Mayor Bruce Harrell made it clear during his campaign that he aims to address "visible crime."</p> <p>Since Harrell assumed office, at least seven patrol officers have been moved over to help empty tent encampments. Seattle officers are targeting city crime "hot spots," people purchasing and selling drugs, and stolen goods from big-box stores.</p> <p>The staffing challenges within the specialty teams of the Seattle Police Department are driven by the lack of active police staffing, Jamie Housen, spokesperson for Mayor Harrell, said by email. He said Harrell has often called for Seattle Police staffing to be restored.</p> <p>The two Seattle Police employees who communicated with KUOW asked not to be named because it is a policy violation to discuss their work with journalists.</p>

Seattle Police employee numbers have been on a downward trend for two years, leaving the department understaffed and clamoring for more bodies, as department heads attempt to address both the needs of the city and the demands of its leaders.

The challenges are plenty. Seattle's year-end crime report states violent and property crime is up. [Harrell promised to address crime hotspots and repeat offenders](#) of low-level crimes. He's been vocal about removing unhoused people from Seattle streets, and officers are being tapped for his cause.

Meanwhile, adult victims of sexual assault have been sidelined, according to officers. It's the visible crime that's being prioritized, not the invisible, they said.

"The Seattle Police Department sexual assault unit is not at all investigating adult sexual assault reports or cases unless there was an arrest," said one source inside the Seattle Police Department.

Four detectives handle sexual assault and child abuse cases in Seattle currently. Crimes against children are the highest priority, because Washington state law requires investigation into these crimes, whereas adult sex assault reports have a longer window in which officers may begin investigating them.

"Our child cases are increasing due to the fact that children are coming back to school from Covid," the Seattle Police employee said. "There's more reporting, and we are seeing an aggressive level of child abuse than we have seen previously."

Seattle detectives continue to investigate crimes reported in early 2020, the employee said. These cases require search warrants, witness interviews, and DNA evidence — which take time.

Fewer officers means that in some cases, people calling to report a sexual assault are routed to the automated telephone reporting unit, designed to address non-urgent calls such as stolen checks.

It has always been difficult for survivors who choose to report their assault to police, or pursue criminal charges, said Mary Ellen Stone, chief executive officer of King County Sexual Assault Resource Center. Stone pointed to a report her group published last year, which found that among a backlog of cases in King County Superior Court, there was 408 sexual assault victims who had been waiting on average 563 days for disposition.

A 2020 report by the King County Auditor's Office found the King County Sheriff's Office and the Prosecuting Attorney's Office sometimes didn't interview sexual assault victims within the recommended time frame, and deputies failed to provide advocacy information, a requirement by law.

"We want to look at this not as 'Oh, my goodness this all of a sudden happened,'" Stone said. "But this has been the state for some time, and now it's worse."

Jordan Walker, a legal advocate with the King County Sexual Assault Resource Center, said he understands that law enforcement agencies are struggling to find staff, but that there are long-term impacts of short staffing. People who file reports but are then ignored would be justifiably frustrated, and share their negative experiences with others in their community — leading to fewer people filing reports in the future.

"When the front door into a criminal case, into someone hearing your story, someone looking into your story, when that door is locked, and you can't even get in, the whole system can feel disenfranchised," Walker said.

He said if cases reported to police aren't being investigated, then the problem isn't improving.

The number of Seattle police officers has gone down since 2019, said Greg Doss, fiscal and policy analyst with the City of Seattle.

There were 958 deployable officers at the end of December; in 2019, there were 1,281.

Doss said a big part of the staffing problem is attributed to officers out on extended leave. This issue began in 2020, he said by email. Many of the officers on extended leave now are using their accrued time, likely before departing permanently.

Some of those were employees who refused to get vaccinated by Oct. 18, Doss said.

The Seattle Police Department declined to provide KUOW with details on caseloads and which units officers are assigned to, due to their “fluid nature,” and as a “matter of policy,” Seattle Police spokesperson Randall Huserik said by email.

In his 2021 year-end crime report, Interim Chief Adrian Diaz said that there had been a reduction in rape cases. But documents obtained by KUOW show that the number of cases coming into the sexual assault and child abuse unit have increased since 2019. These numbers do not separate out rapes from other sexual assaults.

Data from the King County Prosecutor’s Office shows that fewer Seattle Police cases, including those from the sexual assault and child abuse unit, are being sent to prosecutors to determine if charges should be filed.

Chief Diaz has prioritized deploying officers to high-priority emergency calls, and deterring “crime through proactivity,” his spokesperson Randy Huserik said. The Seattle Police blog is peppered with the details of recent shootings, robberies, and photos of guns and drugs police have seized.

Thirty officers make up the Community Response Group, a project Chief Diaz launched in 2020 to lead protest response and work citywide to “enhance 911 and emergency response,” the Seattle Police blotter says.

[This roaming unit of cops on March 31 helped to make 49 shoplifting arrests.](#) They detained a young woman with a baby, after a man who was accused of stealing throw pillows and a memory foam mattress, got in her car at a Lowe’s Home Improvement in Rainier Valley. The woman was driving and fled when police flashed their lights. Several police cars followed them to north Seattle.

Seattle Mayor Harrell continues to make good on his campaign promise to clear the homeless from Seattle’s public spaces, with officers present and available to intervene when activists and mutual aid workers are accused of interfering with the clearing of the homeless.

Seven patrol officers recently moved into the team that assists in emptying out homeless encampments around Seattle — the Alternative Response Team — to aid with this effort and work hot-spot emphasis areas downtown and in the International District.

These actions hearken back to statements made by Harrell in 2012, as a council member concerned about the intersection of Third Avenue and Pine Street, the heart of downtown Seattle.

"You will see open-air drug dealing. You'll see panhandling that's way too aggressive," then City Councilmember [Bruce Harrell told KOMO News.](#) "It's just not a pleasant place to be — and it should be."

“A general funding and staffing crisis for SPD is being exacerbated by politics,” a Seattle Police employee wrote anonymously on social media. KUOW confirmed the author’s identity.

The Seattle Police employee questioned Diaz’s decision to relocate seven officers from patrol to the Alternative Response Team.

“Those officers, while certainly needed, will be spending much of their time working with homeless people who haven't asked for help from the City and in many cases won't accept it,” the officer wrote.

	<p>“Meanwhile vulnerable crime victims who desperately want and need help from SPD are being put on hold. And people in the sexual assault unit are left wondering: If there were seven officers to spare, why couldn't one or two have been assigned to them?”</p> <p>Harrell seemed to approve of Diaz’s approach. He announced a national search for a new police chief last week, and in his announcement expressed his satisfaction with Interim Chief Diaz, and how he’s running the police department.</p> <p>“I have been pleased with Interim Chief Diaz’s approach and commitment to progress on public safety,” Harrell said in a press release. He encouraged Chief Diaz to apply for the job.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 NOAA: methane emissions record spike
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/04/07/methane-emissions-jumped-by-record-2021-noaa-says/
GIST	<p>Global methane emissions soared by a record amount in 2021, eclipsing the record set the year before, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, demonstrating the huge challenge facing policymakers who have pledged to limit greenhouse gas emissions.</p> <p>Methane, the second biggest contributor to human-caused global warming after carbon dioxide, is emitted in part by oil and natural gas production, particularly shale gas drilling. But it’s also emitted by livestock farming and landfills, as well as wetlands whose waterlogged soils, rich in microbes, are ideal for naturally producing methane.</p> <p>Since last year, about 100 countries have signed on to a Global Methane Pledge, which aims to cut emissions 30 percent by the end of the decade. Some major emitters, such as Russia and China, still have not.</p> <p>“Our data show that global emissions continue to move in the wrong direction at a rapid pace,” Rick Spinrad, the NOAA administrator, said in a statement. “The evidence is consistent, alarming, and undeniable.”</p> <p>Recently, climate experts and diplomats have put extra emphasis on controlling methane emissions because it is relatively easy to reduce the emissions by stopping methane escaping from oil and gas wells and leaking from pipelines. Major multinational oil and gas companies have emitted methane in the Permian Basin in Texas and New Mexico. And Russia ranks among the biggest emitters with aging pipelines stretching for roughly 2,500 miles from the remote Yamal Peninsula in Russia to consumers in Europe.</p> <p>“Reducing methane emissions from fossil fuel is an important step, and a low-hanging fruit to reduce atmospheric methane levels,” said Xin “Lindsay” Lan, a research scientist at NOAA’s Global Monitoring Laboratory and the University of Colorado at Boulder. Given that atmospheric methane largely disappears after about nine years, “it can respond rather quickly” to efforts to reduce such emissions.</p> <p>But she added that other factors were also driving emissions. Lan said that heavy rains from the La Nina weather pattern in tropical areas over the past two years might have flushed large quantities of methane from wetlands. Lan added that livestock farming and landfills were also “dominant drivers” behind the upturn in emissions that took place after 2006.</p> <p>Durwood Zaelke, president of the Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development, said that methane concentrations in the atmosphere have continued to spike in recent years both for reasons that are natural and those driven by humans.</p>

But he said that “the need for speed should be motivating every climate scientist, every climate policymaker, every climate activist.” He said that slashing methane emissions represents “the single biggest, fastest and cheapest way to reduce warming in the near term.” He said it also lowers the cost “of climate mitigation and the cost of adaptation, and lowers reliance on learning how to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.”

Zaelke said it is also “the best way to slow feedbacks and avoid tipping points.”

NOAA said that atmospheric methane measured jumped 17 parts per billion (ppb) in 2021, the largest amount since systematic measurements began in 1983. The increase during 2020 was 15.3 ppb.

Atmospheric methane levels averaged 1,895.7 ppb during 2021, or around 162 percent greater than preindustrial levels.

“The latest increases in methane concentrations reinforce the critical importance of reducing human-caused methane emissions if we are going to slow the rate of increase in warming,” Steven Hamburg, chief scientist at the Environmental Defense Fund, said in an email. “There is agreement in the scientific community that the majority of methane emissions are human caused and account for more than a quarter of the warming we are currently experiencing.”

NOAA also announced that carbon dioxide was also rising at a steady but sobering clip. The global surface average for carbon dioxide during 2021 reached 414.7 parts per million, an increase of 2.66 parts per million over the 2020 average. The figure marks the 10th consecutive year that carbon dioxide increased by more than 2 parts per million, the fastest sustained rate of increase in the 63 years since monitoring began.

“The effect of carbon dioxide emissions is cumulative,” Pieter Tans, senior scientist with the [Global Monitoring Laboratory](#), said in a statement. “About 40 percent of the Ford Model T emissions from 1911 are still in the air today. We’re halfway to doubling the abundance of carbon dioxide that was in the atmosphere at the start of the Industrial Revolution.”

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HEADLINE	04/07 Rising sea levels causing migration crisis
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/apr/07/its-happening-now-how-rising-sea-levels-are-causing-a-us-migration-crisis
GIST	<p>Sea levels have risen about 9in since 1880, with one-third of that gain from the last 25 years alone. Every year, a flurry of reports are published warning of the risk to towns and cities along coastal areas.</p> <p>It’s one thing to hear about a looming disaster; it’s another to see the cataclysm play out in real time.</p> <p>That’s what’s happening in Taholah, a village on Washington’s coast that acts as the capital for the Quinault Indian Nation, a tribe of about 3,600 members. In Taholah, climate change-caused sea level rise has brought to the community a fast receding shoreline, and with it a heightened threat of flooding: according to Quinault estimates, the ocean level could increase by 2.6ft by 2100, pushing storm surges higher and bringing waves closer to town.</p> <p>On an overcast February morning, Larry Ralston, the 62-year-old treasurer of the Quinault Nation, drove his silver Ford SUV down a network of Taholah’s unmarked gravel roads, telling me about what this place used to look like, before climate change permanently reconfigured the landscape.</p> <p>Parked on a rock face overlooking the Pacific, he nodded toward a moss-covered boulder towering out of the water. As a kid in the 60s, Ralston said, he was able to trek by foot to the rock. And now? He reckons the water is 30ft deep. Back then the ocean didn’t seem like a menace – at least not an existential one.</p>

That's no longer the case: some 660 Taholah residents who border the ocean now find themselves living in an increasingly dangerous flood zone. The only solution is for everyone – and everything – in the village to move uphill.

“We can see firsthand what's happening,” Ralston told me. “There's no denying it.”

Taholah signals what's to come for coastal communities across the country.

Already, [about 15 million American homes](#) are at risk of flooding, and the threat is only going to get worse. A [report](#) released in February by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (Noaa) projected that sea level along the US coastline would rise by 10 to 12in, on average, in the next 30 years – an uptick that would make damaging flooding occur 10 times more often than it does today.

“It's important to understand in these communities that sea level rise is happening now,” said William Sweet, an oceanographer with Noaa's National Ocean Service and the country's top scientist studying sea level rise. “Its impacts are happening now, and those impacts will grow worse in the next 30 years. Minor-nuisance flooding will be replaced by flooding that's more damaging to economies and to infrastructure.”

That future could very well touch off a mass migration of people away from coastline and flood zones. Research published in 2020 in the journal PLOS One estimated that sea level rise could cause [over 13 million Americans](#) to relocate inland by 2100 – an outcome with huge economic, social and political consequences.

Yet, even with the deluge of warnings, there is no centralized lifeline available to coastal communities. There are a number of federal programs designed to give assistance to such areas through government bodies like the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (Hud), but those pots of money are far from adequate to tackle a problem of this scale. Some local governments have chosen to offer – and in a few cases mandate – buyouts to homeowners in vulnerable areas, who wind up dispersing. Others would prefer to keep the neighborhood intact – in Taholah's case, by moving the whole village.

In 2017, the Quinault Tribal Council adopted the [Taholah Village Relocation Master Plan](#), which would move the lower enclave of the village about a half-mile uphill by 2030, where a new 200-acre development would offer flood-free land for over 300 housing units, a police station, a courthouse, a K-12 school and a museum, among other buildings. The initiative makes the Quinault [among the first](#) in the US – alongside communities in [Louisiana](#) and [Alaska](#), among others – to voluntarily opt for a strategy of managed retreat away from impending climate threats.

To date, the council has been able to build a new administrative complex, a so-called generations building to house Head Start and senior programs, and approximately 150 homes – construction that is owed to a combination of US Department of Agriculture grants, Hud money and the tribe's own funds.

To pay for the rest, Ralston estimates they'll need an additional \$200m – a daunting sum, especially considering the bipartisan infrastructure bill that was signed into law by Joe Biden last year provided just \$130m to support relocation efforts for the [574 federally recognized tribes](#) across the US.

According to the [Department of Health and Human Services](#), there are roughly 5.7 million American Indians and Alaska Natives in the US, many of whom are on the frontlines of climate change. A multi-year study [published](#) last year in the journal Science found that Indigenous nations in the US not only lost 99% of their historical land, but what relatively little they were eventually allotted are often more exposed to climate change hazards than their historical lands.

The Quinault Nation settled permanently on their 189,621-acre reservation – much of it conifer forest and [unsuitable to farming](#) – in the 19th century, after a long and at times contentious negotiation with the Washington government and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Though the allotted land was still a far cry from what was lost, the ocean provided a natural icebox for sockeye salmon (known as “blueback” among the

Quinault peoples), a unique fish that is central to the Quinault identity, and is under threat due in part to ocean acidification and warmer waters.

“There’s a parity between the Quinault people and the blueback,” Ralston said as his SUV ambled past a large illustrated cutout of the salmon affixed to a lamppost. “We try to save our blueback, so we can save ourselves.”

‘I wanted this community’

Two weeks later and 2,400-some miles away from Taholah, I was in the Allen Field subdivision of Houston, Texas, talking with Dolores Mendoza, a 35-year-old mother of three. She is trying to figure out how to convince people in the neighborhood – many of whom are relatives – that the county’s effort to remove them from their homes shouldn’t be ignored.

Taholah and Harris county are a study in contrasts: the former, a cash-strapped program that, if successful, would keep a neighborhood intact; and the latter a messy but better-funded effort that will ultimately move people out of high-risk zones but tear a community apart.

I met Mendoza, who works as a credit controller at an inspection agency, on a chilly afternoon at her former home, a three-bedroom house that’s just a stone’s throw from the [Greens Bayou watershed](#). Harris county bought the place in December, paying Mendoza a total of \$300,000 for the property (\$70,000 for the house and \$230,000 to relocate). The sale was a coup for her, given that she paid \$62,000 to buy the 1,200sq ft house in 2010. She’s since moved to Kingwood, a wealthier neighborhood about 15 miles away.

That’s not to say Mendoza was keen on leaving. She grew up in Allen Field, and, by her count, still has family living in 13 different nearby houses. “I wanted this community,” she said. “It’s not pretty to look at, but my family’s here.” It’s only a matter of time before that’s no longer the case.

As we walked through the beige-colored house, which had been ransacked and vandalized in the two months since its sale, Mendoza recalled how the place used to look when she and her three kids lived there. “This was mine,” she said, gesturing toward a room that was empty except for the shards of glass littered on the floor. “I had my bed here. My makeup vanity here. My TV over here.”

Harris county is a sprawling region of [4.7 million people](#), about [half](#) of whom live in Houston. Much like Taholah, it is caught in climate change’s crosshairs. Hurricanes are becoming [more common](#) in the area, bringing with them enough rainwater to flood the state’s bayou systems. Hurricane Harvey, which hit Houston in 2017 and took the lives of [at least 88](#) in Texas, was the third “500-year flood” within the last three years. Worse yet, the Texas coast has sunk about [2ft](#) within the last century, due in part to excessive groundwater pumping, making the state more vulnerable to flooding.

But Harris county also bears a different distinction: it is the national leader in federally funded home buyouts, responsible for some 2,500 acquisitions, on top of 1,000 homes purchased by the Harris county flood control district with local funds. Since the 1980s, Fema has supported over 43,000 property buyouts in the US. That is well short of the [3.63 million people](#) in the country who are likely to encounter flooding every year.

Until the last few years, buyouts in Harris county were all voluntary and favored affluent and white recipients, mirroring a [national trend](#). In 2020, still reeling from Hurricane Harvey, the county secured funding through Fema and state agencies to introduce a new mandatory buyout program for around 400 mostly residential properties spread throughout eight areas.

It’s estimated the mandatory program will affect about 2,000 people, about 13% of the local populace. In Allen Field, many of the homes that fall under the mandatory buyout guidelines are on Darjean Street, where Mendoza’s family still lives.

Eligible homeowners in Allen Field – 86% of whom are non-white, according to [census data](#) – say the buyout process has been confusing and inefficient.

Some residents were baffled when they first received a legalese-laden mailer explaining that they would have to sell their home to the government. Many in the area aren't fluent in English, making the flyers even more confusing. "There's a lot of red tape that makes it very difficult for families to figure out how to navigate the process," said Shirley Ronquillo, a local community activist who has helped residents navigate buyout programs.

Nor is it clear to many what their lives will look like when they move to a new neighborhood, which could be many miles away. According to a [2019 study](#) published in the journal Social Problems, buyouts cause more significant erosion to the social fabric of communities with lower-value homes and Black and brown residents, in large part because they're forced to move farther away to find affordable housing. (The community services department spokesperson said the program assigns to anyone in the buyout program a relocation specialist to "provide referrals to community resources and organizations to provide further assistance to residents".)

There's also an issue of protraction. "It still takes Harris county over two years to close on the average property," said Rob Moore, a senior policy analyst with the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental advocacy group. Some people, tired of waiting for the government, sell their homes to exploitative speculators, often for [far less](#) than they'd make in a buyout program.

'Why are they being asked to leave?'

While Taholah is a better organized effort, it's also, paradoxically, a less wellfunded one.

"Unfortunately, the limited federal resources available are even less accessible to tribal communities," said Washington representative Derek Kilmer, who worked to secure \$500,000 for the Quinalts' relocation efforts in the fiscal year 2022. Kilmer also sponsored the [Tribal Coastal Resiliency Act](#), which would provide further support to Indigenous communities on coastal issues.

Any additional funding would probably come through the housing, commerce or interior departments, or the Federal Emergency Management Agency – all of which are in the process of [creating or revamping relocation programs](#). But getting money to a community as small as Taholah, where the median household income is [about \\$32,000](#), can be a challenge. "Fema repeatedly told us that these competitive funds are based on numbers, not on need," said Ralston, the Quinault treasurer. "Hurricane Katrina affected a quarter million people. Hurricane Taholah only affects 850 people. So, where are you going to put your money?"

The Quinault Nation applied for two additional grants through Fema in 2020, totaling about \$126,000,000. A Fema spokesperson wrote in an email that both applications were selected for review. "We anticipate the planning grant to be awarded soon."

Taholah's lower village features rows of houses – many of them modest and worn – alongside a gym, a seafood wholesaler, a community center, a gas station-cum-deli, and a few other businesses. Many homes have boats scattered unceremoniously on their yards. There's a 10ft seawall separating the town from the Pacific, though it's been [breached](#) repeatedly in the last few years, despite repeated improvements by the army corps of engineers. "We used to get flooding in the lower village every three to five years," Ralston said. Now it's every year."

Ralston told me about his plans to commemorate the place they'll leave behind. He imagines a park, well-maintained and accessible to the public, with fruit trees and picnic benches. "Just to memorialize the families that used to live here," he said before letting out a quiet sigh. "Obviously that may not happen for a while. It's just a vision."

In Allen Field, Mendoza says that the memory of Harvey – and the lack of government support in the wake of the hurricane – left a bad taste. Harvey hit low-income and non-white areas like Mendoza's [hardest](#), thanks to crumbling infrastructure and insufficient flood control measures.

Ronquillo, the community activist, offered a more scathing critique: “You have a government entity coming in and saying, ‘you have to leave.’ Why are they being asked to leave? Because there was years of negligence, lack of support in our communities of color,” she said.

“Harvey was terrifying,” Mendoza said. “I was here by myself with my kids. I didn’t even know how we were going to get out.” Help never came from the government; it was her brother-in-law, riding in on a hot-wired boat, who rescued Mendoza and her children.

Mendoza waited for a year and half until the county could make good on its offer. She said she was told by the county not to spend money on repairs since she was going to be offloading the asset anyway. “They don’t want us to repair our houses, so we have leaking roofs, broken pipes, electrical problems.” (The community services department spokesperson said the county “encourages the homeowner to make repairs in the cases where by not making the repair a person’s health and safety are endangered”.)

After leaving her house, Mendoza and I walked for a few minutes along the banks of Greens Bayou, where she reflected on her new life. The new house is great, she says. As is the kids’ school. But she still feels like a stranger. “I’ve seen my grandma twice since I moved,” she said. “Usually I’d see her every day, checking the mail when I’d go pick up the kids for school. Now we don’t have that community. I don’t know my neighbors.”

At that moment a pair of adolescent boys ran by us, each one gripping a large ice cream shake. Mendoza knows the boys well; they’re close with her family. “It’s cold,” she said to them with a laugh. “Y’all should have your jackets on.”

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	04/08 Taiwan hunts China chip talent poachers
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/tip-iceberg-taiwans-spy-catchers-hunt-chinese-poachers-chip-talent-2022-04-08/
GIST	<p>TAIPEI, April 8 (Reuters) - Taiwan's spy catchers have launched probes into around 100 Chinese companies suspected of illegally poaching semiconductor engineers and other tech talent, a senior official at the island's Investigation Bureau told Reuters.</p> <p>That comes on top of seven prosecuted since the start of last year and includes 27 which have either been raided or whose owners have been summoned for questioning by the bureau, the official said.</p> <p>Home to industry giant TSMC (2330.TW) and accounting for 92% of the world's most advanced semiconductor manufacturing capacity, Taiwan possesses what China needs - chip expertise in spades.</p> <p>A global chip shortage and Beijing's avowed goal of achieving self-reliance in advanced chips - more forcefully promoted by Chinese President Xi Jinping after a trade war with the former Trump administration - has only intensified the scramble for engineering talent.</p> <p>Taiwan responded with the creation in December 2020 of a task force within the justice ministry's Investigation Bureau - its main spy catching organisation - to tackle poaching.</p> <p>Cases where it has taken action with raids or questioning represented "the tip of the iceberg", the official said, asking to remain anonymous so that investigations are not impeded.</p> <p>The Investigation Bureau said the official's comments represented its views.</p>

Heightened military pressure from China, which claims Taiwan as its territory, has only strengthened Taipei's determination to protect its chip supremacy - an asset also strategically important to the United States as much of its chip manufacturing is outsourced to the island.

Last month the bureau conducted its biggest operation to date - a raid of eight companies aimed at countering what it said was "the Chinese Communist Party's illegal activities of talent-poaching and secret-stealing".

China's Taiwan Affairs Office did not respond to a Reuters request for comment.

TRICKS EMPLOYED

It is not illegal per se for Chinese firms to hire Taiwanese engineers. Taiwanese law, however, prohibits Chinese investment in some parts of the semiconductor supply chain including chip design and requires reviews for other areas such as chip packaging, making it very difficult for Chinese chip firms to operate on the island legally.

Taiwanese engineers are also free to go to China, but many prefer the quality of life on the island, especially while COVID-19 restrictions make travel harder.

One case under investigation involves a firm that purports to be a Taiwanese data analysis company but which authorities believe is an arm of a Shanghai-based chip firm sending chip design blueprints to China, according to the official and another colleague who spoke with Reuters.

In mid-March, after nearly a year of surveillance, the bureau summoned the firm's owner for questioning. The owner has since been released on bail, they said, declining to identify the company as charges have yet to be laid.

Other tricks employed include incorporating units in tax havens such as the Cayman Islands, making it harder to identify money inflows from China.

Beijing-based Starblaze Technology, an integrated circuit (IC) design house, has been accused of running an R&D centre in the tech hub of Hsinchu without approval. It allegedly conducted job interviews via Zoom and used a Hong Kong company to handle payroll and insurance, according to court documents reviewed by Reuters. The trial is ongoing.

Tongfu Microelectronics (002156.SZ), a Chinese state-affiliated company, was accused of having an illegal office whose employees received salaries in U.S. dollars in offshore accounts wired via a Hong Kong-based subsidiary. The defendants were found guilty in January.

Starblaze and Tongfu did not respond to Reuters requests for comment.

THE MOST WANTED

Lucy Chen, vice president of Taipei-based Isaiah Research, says that last year Chinese chip firms came wooing with salary offers two to three times local levels. Among the most sought-after employees are IC designers, who can work remotely.

While it is difficult to compete on salary, local firms aim to provide more secure long-term career development and perks such as daycare centres, massages and gyms on site, said an executive at a Hsinchu chip company, declining to be identified.

Those willing to be poached risk not finding work again at Taiwanese tech firms as well as public shaming. Several senior TSMC executives who went to work for SMIC (0981.HK) in China have been branded as traitors in Taiwanese press.

	<p>Authorities are also working to increase penalties for poaching. Maximum prison sentences are set to be increased to three years from one year and maximum fines from \$5,200 to \$520,525.</p> <p>In a related move, the government has proposed making the leaking of core chip technologies a breach of national security law.</p> <p>But there are concerns that tougher rules might hinder President Tsai Ing-wen's drive to build a supply chain spanning materials to chip manufacturing.</p> <p>"What if we put off legitimate foreign investors and damage our national economy due to overly strict regulation?" said the Investigation Bureau senior official.</p> <p>"It's a dilemma and we need to strike an appropriate balance in between."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Another juvenile escapes facility; arrested
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3427073/another-inmate-escape-echo-glen-arrested/
GIST	<p>A 16-year-old inmate at Echo Glen's Children Center who escaped Thursday night has been arrested by King County Sheriff's Office deputies.</p> <p>The teen — whose previous charges were not violent in nature — was said to have escaped just before 9 p.m. through a gap in a "fenced enclosure," but was apprehended by law enforcement just over two hours later. No staff or residents were injured in the incident.</p> <p>This marks the second recent instance of an escape from the juvenile detention facility, after five inmates broke out in late January. In that incident, the five teenagers — who were all previously convicted for various felonies — had threatened staff with a knife before fleeing in a stolen vehicle. They were each later arrested and returned to the facility, with new felony charges filed against them by the King County Prosecutor's Office.</p> <p>Echo Glen employees have long raised concerns over staffing shortages, evidenced by a 2018 report conducted by the Hyzer Group for the Department of Social and Health Services and the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration. It provided staffing analysis of juvenile rehabilitation centers across the state, including eight community facilities for incarcerated youths and three higher security residential facilities, including Snoqualmie's Echo Glen.</p> <p>Among the report's key findings was that rehabilitation counselors, due to lack of staff, were forced to portion most of their time towards supervision and security tasks, unable to provide "core residential treatment" therapy. Cumulatively, it suggested that the bulk of the state's juvenile rehabilitation facilities are chronically understaffed, and called on the state's Legislature to appropriate additional funds to address the problem.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 US arrests Yakuza leader over scheme
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/07/us-japan-yakuza-takeshi-ebisawa-crime-drugs-weapons
GIST	<p>US authorities have arrested a leader of a Japanese crime syndicate on charges of plotting to distribute drugs in the United States and purchase weapons including US-made surface-to-air missiles.</p> <p>Federal prosecutors in Manhattan said Takeshi Ebisawa, who they described as a leader in a network of Japanese crime families known as yakuza, and a co-conspirator agreed to buy the missiles for rebel groups in Myanmar during conversations with an undercover Drug Enforcement Administration agent.</p> <p>The weapons were intended to protect drug shipments, according to a criminal complaint unsealed on Thursday. Ebisawa planned to distribute heroin and methamphetamine in the United States, prosecutors said.</p>

	<p>“The drugs were destined for New York streets, and the weapons shipments were meant for factions in unstable nations,” Damian Williams, the US attorney for the southern district of New York, said in a statement. “Members of this international crime syndicate can no longer put lives in danger.”</p> <p>Since 2019, US authorities have been investigating Ebisawa’s drug and weapons-dealing network, which reaches from Japan, Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, and the United States, the justice department said in a statement.</p> <p>Ebisawa, 57, and three co-conspirators were detained in Manhattan this week on charges including narcotics importation conspiracy and conspiracy to possess firearms, prosecutors said. A lawyer for Ebisawa did not immediately respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>Each of the four co-conspirators face maximum sentences of life imprisonment.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 King Co. courthouse windows smashed
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/windows-king-county-courthouse-smashed-by-vandal/3XBF2VDJEND2FCITZORFE5YXUU/
GIST	<p>A man smashed in the windows to the Fourth Avenue side of the King County Courthouse with a golf club around 10:40 p.m. on Tuesday, causing significant damage, according to the Seattle Police Department.</p> <p>The man ran off when a security officer arrived. An SPD officer responded to the security officer’s call and an incident report was filed.</p> <p>The courthouse was closed and empty at the time.</p> <p>The security team is reviewing video footage of the incident to share with SPD.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Judge releases woman arrested for murder
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/auburn-woman-arrested-february-2020-murder-edmonds-7-eleven-clerk/HMUPNLNTINAKZK5Z6GVUNGUTKA/
GIST	<p>A judge has released a 26-year-old woman suspected in the murder of an Edmonds 7-Eleven store clerk.</p> <p>Nagendirman Kandasamy was killed Feb. 21, 2020 as he was working his shift at an Edmonds 7-Eleven on Highway 99.</p> <p>An armed assailant allegedly shot and killed Kandasamy after bursting into the store and jumping onto the counter.</p> <p>The woman arrested had previously been taken into custody on March 15, 2020, during a search warrant operation in Enumclaw.</p> <p>She was arrested Wednesday by Auburn police during a traffic stop. She was booked into the Snohomish County Jail for first-degree murder and attempted first-degree robbery.</p> <p>On Friday, she appeared before a judge in Snohomish County and prosecutors said she drove the getaway car.</p> <p>However, her lawyer argues she was not involved in the crime.</p>

	<p>Although the judge found probable cause for murder and attempted robbery, she did not have to stay in jail.</p> <p>She is expected back in court at a later date.</p> <p>Detectives will also recommend charges of first-degree murder, attempted first-degree robbery and unlawful possession of a firearm for a 25-year-old man who had also been taken into custody during the March 2020 operation. He is currently in custody on unrelated charges at the Pierce County Jail.</p> <p>“The cowardly act that took the life of Mr. Kandasamy left a profound impact on his family and our community,” Chief of Police Michelle Bennett said in a statement. “From its first moments, the women and men of Edmonds PD worked tirelessly towards putting this case together and taking a violent suspect off the street. While our detectives led the investigation, they had assistance from several law enforcement partners. This was a total team effort.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Seattle school: man tried to kidnap student
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/police-say-man-tried-kidnap-seattle-middle-school-student/GYFEJWWMRVEV3MFSWKPZW5JBBU/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — A Seattle middle school has extra security in place Thursday after a student reported an attempted kidnapping.</p> <p>The principal of Hamilton International Middle School, Dorian Manza, sent a letter to parents Wednesday night warning them about what happened.</p> <p>According to Seattle police, the student was walking home from school through Wallingford Park toward North 42nd Street and the tennis courts at around 2:50 p.m. when a man came out from some bushes and asked the student if they wanted “a ride home.”</p> <p>The student said no but was grabbed by the man. The student fought back, broke away and ran.</p> <p>Shortly after, the victim’s family called the police.</p> <p>Manza said the school district’s safety and security team will increase its presence around the school.</p> <p>Only a very brief description of the suspect was provided — an older man who is possibly heavysset.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Police: shooting at Kent cemetery; 1 dead
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/shooting-investigation-underway-near-cemetery-kent/Y35V3I2UR5DXBJ7AMJR4OBPPYM/
GIST	<p>KENT, Wash. — One person is dead following a dispute that led to a shooting at Hillcrest Burial Park in Kent.</p> <p>Police were called at around 5:30 p.m. to the 1000 block of Reiten Road for a reported shooting.</p> <p>When officers arrived, they found an unresponsive man with gunshot wounds.</p> <p>Lifesaving measures were performed but the man was pronounced dead at the scene, police said.</p> <p>Police said initial information indicates a dispute had broken out among a group of people before gunfire erupted.</p> <p>After shots rang out, the group fled the area, investigators said.</p>

	Chopper 7 flew over the scene, where a number of evidence markers were scattered on the ground.
	Police said they have limited information at this time and believe it was not a random act.
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HEADLINE	04/07 US: fake agent claims ties to Pakistan intel
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/us-man-impersonated-agent-claimed-ties-to-pakistani-intel/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — One of two men accused of impersonating federal agents and giving actual Secret Service agents gifts and free apartments in Washington has claimed to have ties to Pakistani intelligence and had visas showing travel to Pakistan and Iran, federal prosecutors said Thursday.</p> <p>The men, Arian Taherzadeh, 40, and Haider Ali, 35, were arrested Wednesday. The FBI raided a luxury apartment building in Southeast Washington, where the men were staying and had been offering free apartments and other gifts to U.S. Secret Service agents and officers.</p> <p>During a court appearance Thursday, Assistant U.S. Attorney Joshua Rothstein said Ali had told witnesses that he was affiliated with the Inter-Services Intelligence agency in Pakistan and that he had multiple visas from Pakistan and Iran in the months before prosecutors believe the men began impersonating U.S. law enforcement officials. Rothstein said the U.S. has not yet been able to verify the veracity of Ali's claims to the witnesses.</p> <p>Prosecutors believe the men were trying to “ingratiate themselves” and “integrate” with U.S. federal agents and people who worked in the U.S. defense community, Rothstein said.</p> <p>The FBI searched five residences at the building on Wednesday and three vehicles. They found body armor, gas masks, zip ties, handcuffs, equipment to break through doors, drones, radios and police training manuals, Rothstein said.</p> <p>The two men also had surveillance equipment and a high-power telescope, he said. The FBI found evidence that they may have been creating surveillance devices and also found a binder with information on all the residents in the luxury apartment building, which is home to law enforcement officers, defense officials and congressional staffers.</p> <p>Prosecutors say the men had also set up surveillance in the building and had been telling residents there that they could access any of their cellphones at any time. The residents also told investigators they believed the men had access to their personal information.</p> <p>The FBI also found several firearms — including handguns and ammunition — and disassembled rifle pieces and sniper scopes, Rothstein said.</p> <p>Prosecutors allege Taherzadeh and Ali had falsely claimed to work for the Department of Homeland Security and work on a special task force investigating gangs and violence connected to the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.</p> <p>Taherzadeh is accused of providing Secret Service officers and agents with rent-free apartments — including a penthouse worth over \$40,000 a year — along with iPhones, surveillance systems, a drone, a television, a generator, a gun case and other policing tools, according to court documents. In one instance, Taherzadeh offered to purchase a \$2,000 assault rifle for a Secret Service agent who is assigned to protect the first lady, prosecutors said.</p> <p>The plot unraveled when the U.S. Postal Inspection Service began investigating an assault involving a mail carrier at the apartment building and the men identified themselves as being part of a phony Homeland Security unit they called the U.S. Special Police Investigation Unit.</p>

	<p>Investigators believe Ali had taken multiple trips to the Middle East and had three visas showing he had been to Pakistan and two Iranian visas, Rothstein said. U.S. travel records also showed he had traveled to Istanbul, Turkey and Doha in Qatar, he said.</p> <p>Prosecutors allege one of the men also tried to destroy evidence once he learned he was being investigated. After Taherzadeh found out the FBI was starting to investigate him, he took steps to delete posts on social media and admitted that he had deleted the posts that would've been evidence in the case against him, Rothstein said.</p> <p>A lawyer for Taherzadeh and Ali argued that both men should not be detained. But Magistrate Judge Michael Harvey ordered both men held until a detention hearing can be held on Friday afternoon.</p> <p>Rothstein said the case was being presented to a grand jury and he expected both men to face federal conspiracy charges.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Gas thefts rise as prices soar
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/gas-theft-rises-high-prices/
GIST	<p>Gas prices across the U.S. are so high that some people are stealing fuel from service stations to fill up their own vehicles or resell it to other motorists.</p> <p>Members of a criminal ring in Tampa, Florida, were arrested last month after six men stole \$60,000 worth of fuel from gas stations in the area, according to local authorities. And in Duncan, Texas, thieves have targeted the same station at least a dozen times since gas prices skyrocketed.</p> <p>Similar thefts have been reported across the U.S., as Russia's ongoing war on Ukraine continues to drive up gas prices to the frustration of motorists, according to CBS News correspondent Kris Van Cleave.</p> <p>Thieves use a key that can be found on the internet to tinker with the pump so it releases fuel without payment. They pry open the pump and take as much fuel as they want, Van Cleave reported. The thieves in Texas made off with hundreds of gallons of stolen fuel at a time, a maneuver they repeated over and over under the cover of night.</p> <p>By using a device to bypass the pump's credit card reader and release the gas without payment, they were able to steal more than \$7,000 worth of gas, according to the station's owner.</p> <p>"Bomb on the road"</p> <p>The owner of a gas station in Houston, Texas, believes he was targeted by someone in a minivan equipped with a trap door who parked the vehicle over underground storage tanks and sucked up more than \$5,000 worth of stolen gas, according to Van Cleave.</p> <p>"It's extremely common. We know that this is happening," said Dallas police Sergeant Richard Santiesteban.</p> <p>Some motorists are stealing gas to fill up their own tanks. Others are trucking hundreds of gallons to their homes and operating illegal gas stations, where they sell the stolen gas at a discount.</p> <p>But transporting large quantities of fuel is itself a risk.</p> <p>"It's an actual bomb that's on the road and this is very volatile. It's extremely dangerous," Santiesteban said.</p> <p>Criminals are also targeting parked cars. While most new vehicles have stoppers that prevent criminals from siphoning fuel from tanks through the main valve, thieves get underneath the vehicles and drill holes directly into fuel tanks.</p>

	<p>Atlanta, Georgia, resident Nick Trujillo didn't realize he was a victim of gas theft until he tried to refill his tank.</p> <p>"I was driving to go pick up food and stopped at the gas station. I started filling up with gas and the gas is just spewing everywhere. I got underneath the car and looked at it and there was a hole underneath the gas tank," he told CBS News.</p> <p>In light of such incidents, AAA recommends that drivers park their cars in garages or secure parking areas.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/07 Convicted: illegal secret China work
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/kansas-researcher-convicted-illegal-secret-china-work-83948830
GIST	<p>A researcher was convicted on Thursday of illegally concealing work he was doing for China while employed at the University of Kansas.</p> <p>But U.S. District Judge Julie Robinson continues to weigh a defense motion to dismiss the case against Feng “Franklin” Tao of Lawrence, Kansas. Robinson on Monday asked the attorneys to submit their arguments in writing, with the trial to proceed while she weighs the issue.</p> <p>Jurors found him guilty of three counts of wire fraud and one count of false statements for not disclosing on conflict of interest forms that he had been named to a Chinese talent program, the Changjiang Professorship, on grant applications. As part of that program he traveled to China to set up a laboratory and recruit staff for Fuzhou University, telling the University of Kansas he was in Germany instead.</p> <p>Prosecutor Adam Barry described it as “an elaborate lie” to defraud the university, the U.S. Department of Energy and the National Science Foundation.</p> <p>But Defense attorney Peter Zeidenberg argued that Tao was merely “moonlighting” and stressed throughout the trial that Tao remained such a prolific researcher that the University of Kansas honored him in April 2019 — just months before his arrest. He contended that Tao completed all the research he received grants to conduct and said his work in China wasn’t against the rules because he wasn’t paid for it.</p> <p>Zeidenberg also noted that Tao listed his affiliation with both schools in some papers, suggesting he wasn’t hiding it. He didn't immediately respond to a text message asking about the verdict.</p> <p>The case against Tao was part of what the Justice Department called its China Initiative, an effort created in 2018 to crack down on trade secret theft and economic espionage. The department in February ended the initiative following public criticism and failed prosecutions, though officials say they still intend to pursue the threat from China.</p> <p>Tao, who was born in China and moved to the U.S. in 2002, began working in August 2014 at the University of Kansas’ Center for Environmentally Beneficial Catalysis, which conducts research on sustainable technology to conserve natural resources and energy.</p> <p>Tao faces up to 20 years in federal prison and a fine up to \$250,000 for wire fraud, and up to 10 years and a fine up to \$250,000 on each of the program fraud counts.</p>
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